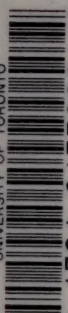


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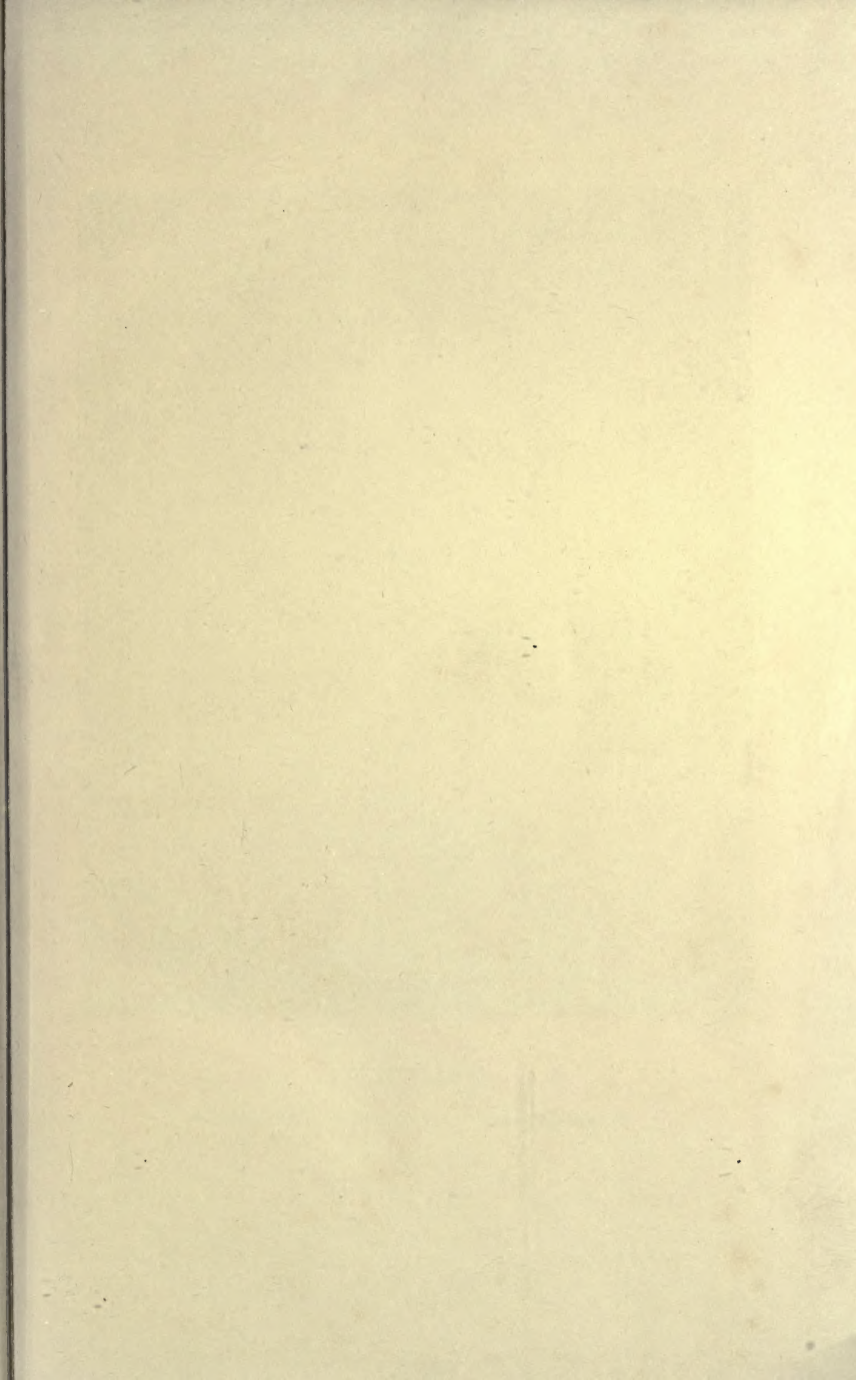


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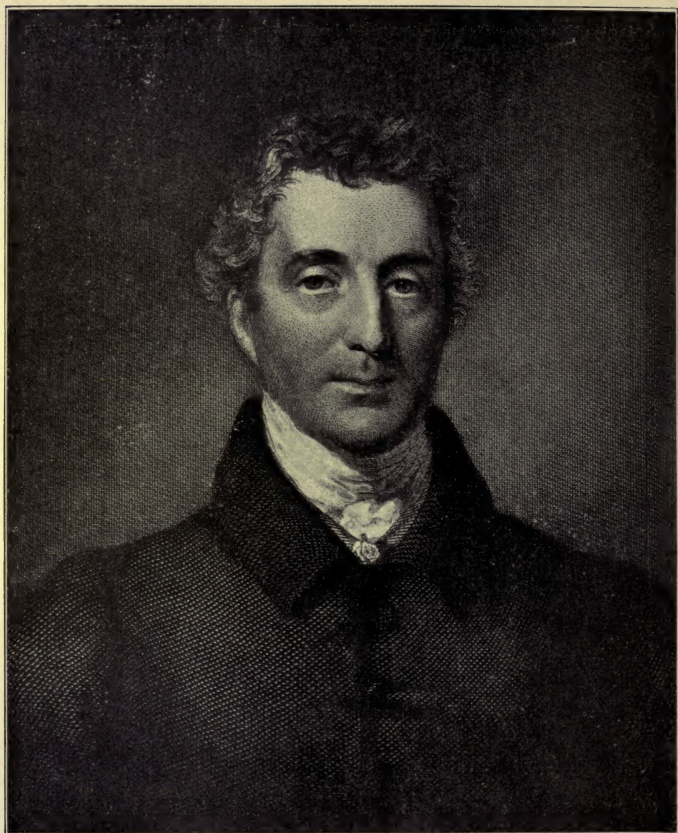
HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE

"England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example."—PITT'S LAST PUBLIC WORDS.

"A people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants."—MACAULAY.







WELLINGTON

*From an engraving after the painting by G. HAYTER*

# HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE:

THE STORY OF THE  
GREAT WAR (1793-1815)

BY

W. H. FITCHETT, B.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "DEEDS THAT WON THE EMPIRE"  
"FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG," ETC.

*WITH PORTRAITS, FACSIMILES, AND PLANS*

III. THE WAR IN THE PENINSULA



LONDON  
GEORGE BELL & SONS  
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1900



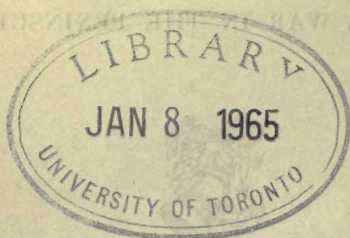
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"The Century Magazine."

Walker & Eustell sc.





## PERIOD V.—THE WAR IN THE PENINSULA

(*From the entrance of the French into Spain, October 18, 1807, to Wellington's passage of the Bidassoa, October 7, 1813.*)

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1807.	Oct.	18.	French army enters Spain on the march to Lisbon.
	„	27.	Treaty of Fontainebleau for partition of Portugal.
	Nov.	27.	Junot enters Lisbon.
1808.	Jan.		Spanish fortresses on the frontier seized by the French.
	Mar.	18.	Riots at Aranjuez.
	„	19.	Charles IV. abdicates in favour of his son.
	„	23.	French under Murat enter Madrid.
	April	11.	Ferdinand leaves Madrid for France.
	May	2.	Insurrection at Madrid; Murat named Lieutenant-General of Spain.
	„	6.	Treaty of Bayonne; Charles and Ferdinand surrender Spanish throne to Napoleon.
	„	24.	Asturian deputies sent to ask aid from England.
	June	6.	Napoleon bestows Spanish crown on Joseph.
	July	20.	Joseph makes state entry into Madrid; Dupont surrenders at Baylen.
	„	30.	Joseph abandons Madrid.
	Aug.	1.	British troops under Wellesley land at Mondego Bay.
	„	17.	Battle of Roliça.
	„	21.	„ „ „ Vimiero.
	„	30.	Convention of Cintra.
	Oct.	26.	Moore begins his march from Lisbon.

1808. Nov. 10. French defeat Spanish at Gammonal ; at Espinosa, Nov. 11 ; at Tudela, Nov. 23.  
 Dec. 4. Napoleon enters Madrid.
1809. Jan. 16. Moore defeats French at Corunna.  
 Feb. 21. Surrender of Saragossa.  
 Mar. 1. American Non-intercourse Act against England and France.  
 „ 28. Soult storms Oporto.  
 April 12. French fleet destroyed in Basque Roads.  
 May 12. Passage of the Douro ; Wellesley enters Spain.  
 July 21-22. Battle of Aspern.  
 „ 26. „ „ Wagram.  
 „ 27-28. „ „ Talavera.  
 Aug. Walcheren expedition.  
 Oct. 11. Peace of Vienna between Austria and France.
1810. April 2. Marriage of Napoleon and Maria Louisa ; Massena appointed to command of army in Portugal.  
 July 3. Isle of Bourbon and Mauritius captured, leaving France without a colony.  
 „ 11. French capture Ciudad Rodrigo.  
 Aug. 18. Decree ordering all English manufactures on the Continent to be burned.  
 „ 28. Surrender of Almeida to the French.  
 Sept. 27. Battle of Busaco.  
 Oct. 12. Wellington enters the lines of Torres Vedras.
1811. Mar. 6. Massena retreats from Santarem.  
 „ 7. Battle of Barossa.  
 „ 11. Betrayal of Badajos to the French.  
 May 3-5. Battle of Fuentes d'Onore.  
 „ 10. English capture Almeida.  
 „ 16. Battle of Albuera.  
 Oct. 28. Surprise of French at Arroyo de Molinos.
1812. Jan. 8. Wellington begins siege of Ciudad Rodrigo ; captures it, 19th.  
 Mar. 16. Siege of Badajos begun ; stormed, April 6th.  
 May 19. Hill captures Almaraz.  
 June 17. Wellington enters Salamanca.  
 „ 18. War between England and the United States ; Napoleon invades Russia.

1812. July 22. Battle of Salamanca.  
 Aug. 13. Wellington enters Madrid.  
 „ 17. Napoleon captures Smolensko.  
 „ 24. Siege of Cadiz raised by French.  
 Sept. 7. Battle of Borodino.  
 „ 15. French enter Moscow.  
 „ 19. Siege of Burgos.  
 Oct. 19. French retreat from Moscow.  
 „ 21. Wellington begins retreat from Burgos.  
 Nov. 1. French re-enter Madrid.  
 „ 18. Retreat from Burgos ends at Ciudad Rodrigo.  
 „ 26-28. Passage of the Beresina.  
 Dec. 19. Napoleon returns to Paris ; sixth coalition against France.
1813. April 10. French evacuate Madrid.  
 May 2. Battle of Lutzen ; of Bautzen, May 24.  
 June 4. Armistice of Pleswitz.  
 „ 21. Battle of Vittoria.  
 July 13. Siege of San Sebastian begun ; Soult assumes command of French army at Bayonne.  
 „ 25. Failure of assault on San Sebastian ; beginning of battles of the Pyrenees.  
 „ 27-28. Battles of Sauroren.  
 Aug. 10. Austria joins Russia and Prussia against Napoleon.  
 „ 26. Siege of San Sebastian resumed.  
 „ 27. Battle of Dresden ; Blücher defeats French at Katzbach.  
 „ 29. Defeat of Vandamme at Kuln ; of Ney at Dennewitz.  
 Sept. 10. Fall of San Sebastian.  
 Oct. 7. Passage of the Bidassoa.





# HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE:

THE STORY OF THE GREAT WAR

(1793-1815)

## CHAPTER I

### NAPOLEON AND SPAIN

NAPOLEON has supplied the world with many contradictory explanations of his fatal policy in Spain, some of them addressed to his contemporaries, some of them to posterity. Most of them, it may be added, are pure inventions. For Napoleon lied as diligently to posterity as he did to those immediately about him, whom it was his interest for the moment to deceive.

Perhaps the nearest approach he ever made to frankness as to his Spanish policy is in the explanation he offered to Metternich on August 25, 1808. "I went to Spain," he said, "because that country, instead of putting its money into the navy which I required against England, spent it all in reinforcing

its army, which could only be used against me. . . . And then the throne was occupied by Bourbons. They are my personal enemies. They and I cannot occupy thrones at the same time in Europe." Napoleon's motive was, in short, compounded of suspicion, hate, and unashamed selfishness. He hated the Bourbons and the English. He suspected, with the mistrust natural to the Corsican side of his nature, that even so servile an ally as Spain had hitherto been might some day turn against him. For Spain the single end of existence was to be Napoleon's tool. Had it treasures? Not to expend them on "the ships which I required," says Napoleon, was an inexpiable offence! Then he wanted a new crown for the head of a Bonaparte. Above all, Spain must become French to complete the zone of the Continental system.

As a mere study in colossal and artistic duplicity, no chapter of Napoleon's career, perhaps, quite compares with his Spanish diplomacy in 1808. During those fateful nineteen days at Tilsit, when the two Emperors arranged a new Europe, partitioning kingdoms and shifting nations and governments like pawns on a chessboard, there can be no doubt that Spain was surrendered to Napoleon exactly as Finland was to Alexander. But Napoleon arranged the Spanish comedy with the skill of a great artist. Spain was to begin by being his accomplice; it was to end by becoming his victim. He gave Portugal the

choice of declaring war against England or of being attacked by France. Before an answer to his ultimatum was received, he had agreed with Spain for the partition of Portugal. One-third was to be given as a principality to Godoy; another third was to form a principality for a cadet of the Spanish House; the remaining third was to be kept in hand as a counter in the diplomatic game, when next a peace had to be negotiated. Portugal was thus to be as remorselessly partitioned as Poland had been.

To carry out this ingenious bit of vivisection, 30,000 men under Junot were to march across Spain and seize Lisbon. Junot, however, received instructions from Napoleon to make a military survey of Spain as he crossed it, and to put French garrisons into every place in Portugal he occupied. Napoleon, in a word, was not merely about to cheat his accomplice of its share of the spoil; he was already arranging to plunder it of its own possessions.

On October 28, 1807, Napoleon writes to his Minister of War:—"I desire my troops shall arrive at Lisbon as soon as possible, to seize all English merchandise. I desire they shall, if possible, go there as friends, in order to take possession of the Portuguese fleet." Junot was instructed by Napoleon himself to issue a proclamation declaring that "the shedding of blood is repugnant to the noble heart of the Emperor Napoleon, and if you will receive us as auxiliaries, all will be well." By these means,

Napoleon explains cynically, "Junot may contrive to get to Lisbon as an auxiliary. The date of his arrival will be calculated here to a couple of days, and twenty-four hours later a courier will be sent to inform him that the Portuguese proposals have not been accepted, and he is to treat the country as that of an enemy." "Eight or ten ships of war and all those dockyards," Napoleon coolly adds, "would be an immense advantage to us."

Napoleon understood how much depended on the speed of Junot's march. If Lisbon could be reached in time, not only would the city become a prey, but the Portuguese fleet would be seized; and, added to a Russian squadron of twelve sail of the line on its way to that port, would become, with the Spanish fleet, the left wing of that stupendous, if somewhat visionary, fleet of not less than 180 ships of the line, which, in the chambers of Napoleon's plotting brain, was already taking form. So Junot was charged to press on without regard to the suffering or the lives of his troops; and, as the French general saw glittering before him the air-drawn likeness of a kingly crown, he obeyed these instructions literally.

Over 200 miles of mountain passes, through hunger and tempest, he hurried his troops, until of a column which at Alcantara had numbered 25,000 men, only 2000 were left to limp into Lisbon, footsore, ragged, sickly, more like a procession of incurables from



some great hospital than a march of soldiers. Some dropped in the streets, says Southey, others lay down in the porches till the passers-by gave them food. Lisbon was a city of 300,000 inhabitants, with a garrison of 14,000 troops; a powerful British squadron under Sir Sidney Smith lay at the entrance of the Tagus ready to help. But the mere imagination of Napoleon's power, like some mighty and threatening phantom, seemed to enter Lisbon with Junot's footsore and ragged grenadiers, and the city fell without a stroke.

Meanwhile the King of Spain, by a solemn treaty, was assured of a share not only of Portugal, but of all her colonies. With a touch of sardonic humour Napoleon even invented a new title for the monarch whom he proposed to discrown. The King of Spain was to have the title of "the Emperor of the two Americas!" It was easy to be generous of glittering syllables to the dupe whom it was intended to plunder of a kingdom.

The domestic troubles and scandals of the Spanish court gave Napoleon his opportunity. Charles IV. was a senile cripple. The Queen was a false and shameless wife. Her lover, Godoy, practically ruled Spain. The heir-apparent, Ferdinand, was a son without affection and without character. The Spanish court was a witches' dance of intrigues and hatreds—Ferdinand plotting against his father; the shameless Queen, with her lover and the dishonoured King,

plotting against Ferdinand. There is no space to tell here how Napoleon played with these vile figures as his tools, and meanwhile silently pushed his troops into Spain, seizing one stronghold after another. The King accused his son to Napoleon; Ferdinand appealed to Napoleon for protection from his father. Napoleon listened to each, fanned their passions to a fiercer heat, and still pushed new troops through the Pyrenees.

Junot by this time had reached Lisbon, and the royal family of Portugal had taken shipping for Brazil under the protection of a British squadron. Junot published a decree, drawn up by Napoleon himself, which began with the sonorous announcement, "The House of Braganza has ceased to reign," and ended by directing a bottle of wine to be given to each French soldier in Portugal every day at the Portuguese cost. "To abolish an ancient royalty in a single sentence was picturesque; the bottle of wine," says Lanfrey, "is less epic, but it brings the real truth before us." There was always a basis of plunder to Napoleon's conquests, and for Napoleon's appetite nothing was too little and nothing too big. The French soldier was to have a daily bottle of wine at Portuguese expense; Napoleon himself imposed a tribute of 200,000,000 francs on the Portuguese treasury.

Murat was now sent to Spain in command of the French forces there, with instructions to push

on towards Madrid, get possession of as many strong places as possible, and announce that Napoleon himself was coming "to besiege Gibraltar." Murat, it may be added, was allowed to entertain the hope of himself grasping the Spanish crown. The French hitherto, as it was believed they were supporting Ferdinand against the old king and the much-hated Godoy, had been received as friends; but Spanish jealousy was now taking fire. The old king, wearied of the struggle, abdicated in favour of his son, who assumed the title of Ferdinand VII., and the event was welcomed with universal delight.

But it by no means suited Napoleon's plans to have a young and popular king instead of one who was old and hated. Murat silently ignored Ferdinand VII. He persuaded Charles to withdraw his abdication and declare it had been extorted from him by force. "You must act as if the old king were still reigning," Napoleon wrote to his general on March 27. On the same day he offered the Spanish throne to his brother Louis, then King of Holland. Three days afterwards, Napoleon wrote again to Murat, "You must re-establish Charles IV. at the Escorial, and declare that he governs in Spain;" but the unfortunate king was only to discharge the office of a royal warming-pan for a Bonaparte.

Long afterwards Napoleon invented a letter, dated March 29, in which he rebukes Murat for entering Madrid with such precipitation, and warns him that



he may kindle a national uprising in Spain. This letter is a mere forgery. It was intended to deceive history, and save Napoleon's credit at the expense of Murat's. Napoleon, as a matter of fact, directed by the most explicit instructions every step Murat took. Meanwhile the two mock kings of Spain were forced to carry their disputes in person to Napoleon at Bayonne. "If the abdication of Charles was purely voluntary," Napoleon wrote to Ferdinand, "I shall acknowledge your Royal Highness as King of Spain." Yet at that moment Napoleon's plan was complete for putting his own brother on the Spanish throne.

On April 20 the unhappy Ferdinand crossed the tiny stream that separates Spain from France, and met Napoleon at Bayonne. He found himself a prisoner, and was bluntly told he must renounce the crown of Spain. He proved unexpectedly obstinate. The old king and his queen, with Godoy, were brought on the scene. They overwhelmed the unhappy prince with curses. His amazing mother, in her husband's presence, denied his legitimacy. Napoleon gave him the choice of abandoning his birthright or of being tried as a rebel. In the end Ferdinand surrendered the crown to his father, who had already transferred it to Napoleon. By a second act of renunciation Ferdinand himself formally abdicated in favour of Napoleon, father and son receiving residences in France and annuities amounting to £500,000 a year.



Napoleon, for this modest price, bought Spain and all her colonies, but, with a touch of cynical humour, he made these pensions a charge on the Spanish revenues. The price for which Spain was sold must, in a word, be paid in Spanish coin and out of Spanish pockets! Both the old king and Ferdinand, it may be added—not without a certain sense of satisfaction—found much difficulty in extracting from Napoleon even the poor sum for which they had sold him a crown. Ferdinand, later, found it difficult to forget that he was of the royal caste, and wrote to Napoleon as his “cousin.” “Try to make Monsieur de San Carlos understand,” Napoleon wrote to Talleyrand, “that this is ridiculous. He must call me Sire!”

Napoleon believed the whole transaction was now a shining success. He foresaw no difficulties; he anticipated no war. His claim to the new throne was fortified by the double renunciation of father and son in his favour. He was, he persuaded himself, the heir of the Bourbons, not their supplanter. A strip of parchment, scribbled over with lies, constituted a valid title to a throne! A nation might be transferred, he believed, with a drop of ink, and of such curiously dirty ink! On May 14 he wrote to Cambaceres: “Opinion in Spain is taking the direction I desire. Tranquillity is everywhere established.”

But never was a profounder mistake. Napoleon omitted from his calculation human nature, especially

Spanish human nature. He thought, when he had tricked a senile monarch into abdication and terrified his worthless heir-apparent into a surrender of his rights, all was ended. He forgot that there remained the Spanish people, ignorant, superstitious, half-savage; but hot-blooded, proud, revengeful. A nation by temper unsuited, perhaps, to great and combined movements; but, alike by its virtues and vices, fitted beyond any other nation of Europe to maintain a guerilla warfare, cruel, bloody, revengeful, tireless; a conflagration that ran like flame in dry grass, and yet had the inextinguishable quality of the ancient Greek fire.

## CHAPTER II

### A NATIONAL RISING

THE attempt to remove the last members of the royal family from Madrid on May 2 produced a furious popular outbreak, in which many French soldiers were killed, but which Murat suppressed with stern energy, and avenged by many executions. On May 20 the *Madrid Gazette* announced that both Ferdinand and his father had abdicated in favour of Napoleon.

This was the signal for a popular outbreak that swept like a tempest over Spain. Madrid was not to Spain what Berlin was to Prussia, or Vienna to Austria, or Paris to France—the single nerve-centre of the whole nation. Spain had half a hundred independent nerve-centres. It was more, indeed, like a cluster of tiny, but jealous and independent, republics than a single kingdom. Each province had its own local horizon, beyond which it never looked, and its own local administration, which remained quite unaffected by what might happen elsewhere. And underneath all provincial jealousies, and all varieties of local char-

acter, there was, as a basis, the common Spanish nature, superstitious to the point of childishness, but proud as with the pride of ancient Rome, and fierce alike in hate and revenge as only Southern nations can be.

At a hundred independent points over Spain revolt awoke. There was no waiting for signal from elsewhere, for common plans or concerted movements. Spain exploded in independent patches. Each city acted as if it were a self-governed republic; each province was as though it were itself Spain. On May 22 Carthagená was in arms; on the 23rd Valencia proclaimed Ferdinand king. Then all the hill-tops in the Asturias flamed with signal-fires. On the 26th Seville sounded the tocsin. Within ten days from the announcement that the crown of Spain had been pawned, like a second-hand coat, to Napoleon, the French authority in Spain had shrunk to the limits of the French camps. Yet there were 180,000 French troops in Spain!

The outbreak everywhere took a common form. The wrathful crowds crystallised into juntas; the juntas acted as independent powers. The Junta of the Asturias calmly clothed itself with sovereign functions, issued a declaration of war against Napoleon, and despatched envoys to England—then at war with Spain—to demand help. The Junta of Seville mistook itself for the nation, and adorned itself with the magnificent title of the Supreme Junta of Spain and



the Indies. Spanish enthusiasm easily effervesces into gorgeous syllables!

The Spanish rising against Napoleon was, of course, a very mixed product. A leaven of cruelty ran through it. It often lacked sanity. It knew nothing of method. It was intoxicated with pride. It waltzed with breathless speed from the opposite extreme of fiery heroism to one of mere shivering cowardice. It was never less soldierly than when organised into martial shape. The story of the siege of Saragossa is one of the most kindling tales of human courage and suffering in all literature. Yet Wellington, with his chilly common sense, was able to say of his Spanish auxiliaries, "They did nothing that ought to be done, with the exception of running away, and assembling again in a state of nature." "Did you ever see the Spanish troops stand to their work?" he was once asked. "No," was his reply; "the best would fire a volley while the enemy was out of reach, and then all run away."

They would fight after their own fashion, in a word, but that fashion was not in formal line of battle. Yet Napoleon was accustomed to say, "The Spanish ulcer destroyed me." And the scale and waste of that "ulcer" are not easily realised. The chief mischief of the Spanish revolt lay in the fact that it gave England its fatal opportunity. It taught the Continental nations, too, that Napoleon was to be defeated. "We ought not," said Blücher,

"to count ourselves less brave than Spaniards." But Spain revealed, also, where Napoleon was vulnerable. The march of Napoleon's ambition was to be checked only by the strength and depths of a national uprising; and Spain was the first example of the outbreak, not of a government, but of a people against Napoleon.

What Spain cost Napoleon in direct losses can, in a rough way, be measured. Wellington, the least exaggerative of men, translates it into a bit of almost horrifying arithmetic. "I entertain no doubt," he says, "that, from first to last, Napoleon sent 600,000 men into Spain, and I know that not more than 100,000 went out in the shape of an army; and, with the exception of Suchet's corps, these were without cannon or baggage, or anything to enable them to act as an army." Of course this huge loss was due to Wellington's campaigns in Spain more than to the spluttering guerilla warfare of the Spaniards themselves. Nevertheless, Spain gave to England a battlefield, a cause, and the alliance of a nation.

Napoleon summoned a phantom Parliament of Spanish notables at Bayonne. On June 6, 1808, the crown of Spain was presented to Joseph, and accepted by him. But the war which the French troops in Spain had now to wage was one of a new character, planless, sporadic, inextinguishable; and on July 19 a great disaster befell the French arms. Dupont, who with 23,000 men held Andalusia, was surrounded



JOSEPH BONAPARTE

*From an engraving after a portrait by PICART*





and with his whole corps laid down his arms. A French army was suddenly blotted out, and the prestige of France, not merely in Spain itself, but far beyond its borders, reeled from the shock. Joseph had to abandon his new capital within a week of his triumphal entrance into it.

Napoleon punished Dupont by long years of imprisonment without trial; but time brings strange revenges, and it brought to Dupont a revenge of which neither Napoleon nor his unlucky marshal could have dreamed. Dupont was the first Bourbon Minister of War after the fall of Napoleon, and it fell to him to sign the formal order for the transport of "Napoleon Bonaparte, ci-devant Empereur des Français," to the island of Elba!

Six weeks after the capitulation of Baylen a yet more ominous event took place. On August 1, 1808, Wellesley, with 12,000 men, landed at Figueras. England, in a word, had stepped on to the great stage of the Peninsula.

Spain represents the fatal blunder of Napoleon's career. Popular belief credits Napoleon with almost supernatural genius, an insight that was never deceived, and a wisdom that never blundered. But the belief is a mere superstition, and as independent of evidence as a superstition. Into this business of Spain he crowded blunders enough to wreck a dozen reputations. Under Charles or Ferdinand Spain was the obedient and costless tool of Napoleon. Her

fleets and colonies were but pawns on the chess-board of his plans. It is a proof of Napoleon's contemptuous way of treating Spain—as a mere will-less counter in the game of his politics—that in 1807, while Spain was still a sovereign state and his ally, he had calmly offered the Balearic Isles—a Spanish possession—to Great Britain in exchange for Sicily! Napoleon was able to treat his ally as a mere subject for experiments in political vivisection. But when, for the sake of thrusting a Bonaparte on the Spanish throne, he affronted the national pride, Spain became his deadly enemy, and 180,000 French troops were at once entangled in its confused guerilla warfare. Napoleon thus lost Spain when he snatched the Spanish crown.

He utterly misread, too, the forces with which he was dealing. Himself the offspring of the Revolution, he could not understand that behind the mean and corrupt figures that formed the court of Spain—the complaisant husband, the vile wife, the plotting son, the disgraceful favourite—there was a nation of 11,000,000 people, and that the uprising of a nation was the entrance of a new factor into the strife—a force mightier than the lies of diplomatists or the intrigues of politicians. The latest theory about Charles I. of England is that he was essentially a Celt, and, as a consequence of possessing the Celtic temperament, could neither understand Englishmen nor govern them. If in mental type they had not

been obstinately Celtic, the Stuarts, it is said, might still have sat on the English throne. Their failure is but an incident in the secular struggle betwixt the Celt and the Saxon; an illustration of the enduring intellectual incompatibility of the two types.

But Napoleon had not any similar excuse for failure in Spain. The Corsican in him ought to have understood the Basque! Better than any pure Frenchman, he might have realised what hot-blooded Iberian passion meant when kindled in 11,000,000 Spaniards. But this is exactly what Napoleon failed to realise. He, the representative and heir of the Revolution, thought an entire nation was disposed of by the signature of the most contemptible member of it, because he happened to be a king! He actually believed that a drop of ink on a pen held by Charles IV.'s trembling fingers settled the Spanish trouble! The religion of Spain, too, he imagined, was like that of Italy, a servile and strengthless thing. "Those countries where there are the greatest number of monks," he wrote, "are easy to subdue. I have had experience of it." But the monks in this case were of the Spanish variety—who could kill or be killed!

Betwixt Spain and France, too, rose the Pyrenees, and Napoleon had to fight far from his base. On the other hand, round three faces of the Peninsula rolled the sea, and the sea was the natural field and base of England. A duller brain than that of Napoleon might well have understood the scale of the blunder



that was being committed. But Napoleon's otherwise keen intellect was intoxicated with success. His genius was drugged with pride; it was ruled by a superstitious belief in his "star."

Meanwhile, Napoleon, utterly blind as to the future, found a childish delight in his new kingdom. He was busy reckoning up how much gold Mexico would yield him, what tribute Spain. He saw, with the eye of fancy, new fleets coming into existence. France had, even after Trafalgar, forty-two line-of-battle ships; the Baltic Powers, Napoleon reckoned, would give him fifty-four; Spain, thirty-five. Here was a fleet of 131 ships of the line, as he explained to his somewhat sceptical Minister of Marine. "England is mine!" he wrote. The true road to London, he was persuaded, lay through Madrid.

But Napoleon's picture of Spain under a Bonaparte was as unreal as Sancho Panza's kingdom of Barataria. Everything went by contraries. Each sanguine expectation turned to ashes in his hands. He found the Spanish treasury empty, and had to pawn the crown jewels to raise £1,000,000. He sent to Cuesta the appointment of Viceroy of Mexico, and Cuesta, by way of reply, took command of the insurgent forces against him in Leon. Napoleon would reap a new harvest of victories; he found the capitulation of Baylen and of Cintra. He thought he had gained a subject nation; it proved to be a new and most ferocious enemy. He gave to Joseph a throne



and 11,000,000 subjects, and the unhappy Joseph found himself absolutely alone. "I have not one single partisan here," he wrote to his brother. "Neither the honest men nor the rogues," reported the disgusted Joseph, "are on my side." "There is nothing to fear," Napoleon wrote on July 21; and on that very day Dupont was surrendering with his entire army! "In one month," says Lanfrey, "from July 15 to August 20, Napoleon had experienced more checks than he ever sustained in his whole career." The magic spell of his fortune seemed, at last, to be shattered.

## CHAPTER III

### THE APPEAL TO ENGLAND

ON the night of June 6, 1808, two Asturian deputies landed at Falmouth, bringing to England an appeal for help from the local Junta. Never were the messengers of a people attended with less of official pomp. The two Asturians had actually started from the Spanish coast in an open boat; they had been picked up by a casual privateer and brought after nightfall to Falmouth, and by seven o'clock the morning after they landed they were pouring their tale into eager ears at the British Admiralty. Spain and Great Britain, as a matter of official fact, were at that moment at war, and 5000 troops were on the point of starting to attack the Spanish colonies—the very troops, it may be added, which, two months later, were fighting for Spain at Vimiero! The Asturian deputies, in a sense, had no credentials. They represented no settled government. They spoke not for Spain, but for only a tiny patch of it. Yet these two vagrant Spaniards instantly took captive, not only the shrewd brains of English statesmen, but the gene-

rous sympathies of the common people of the three kingdoms.

The rising of Spain against Napoleon was a portent visible to all Europe. It changed the whole aspect of the world's politics. The Asturian deputies were received not merely as the spokesmen of a nation, but as the symbols of a totally new force which had suddenly emerged in the struggle against Napoleon. The British Opposition welcomed them as eagerly as did Ministers. They represented, in a word, a movement which satisfied both the great political parties in England.

The Grenville Ministry, during their brief period of office, abandoned Pitt's policy of costly coalitions. They would not hire by vast subsidies half-hearted governments, moved chiefly by dynastic interests, to oppose Napoleon. As a sign of the new policy, they dismantled the whole transport service of Great Britain. They saved by this £4000 per month; but as Alison—whose arithmetic probably has a Tory complexion—argues, they added eight years to the duration of the Great War, and increased the public debt of Great Britain by £400,000,000 sterling! Pitt's policy, that is, would have put 30,000 British troops into the battle-line at Friedland against Napoleon; and, in that case, there might have been no Treaty of Tilsit, no Continental system, and no Peninsular War. But even the Grenville Ministry declared that, if a nation awoke to fight for existence

and freedom against the new despotism, then England would cast all her wealth and strength into the struggle on its side. Now Spain offered exactly such an example of a national uprising.

The Portland Ministry, at that moment in power, inherited Pitt's coalition policy, and its two leading spirits, Canning and Castlereagh, welcomed the chance of not only aiding a nation against Napoleon, but of destroying a new naval combination against Great Britain. A new force had arisen in English politics. George Canning was not exactly a Pitt, but as compared with the Addingtons, the Portlands, the Percevals, the Liverpools of the time, he had something of Pitt's scale and much of Pitt's spirit. He was the greatest personal force in the Ministry of which Portland (and afterwards Perceval) was the nominal head. He breathed a new daring and energy into the war. The situation created by the Treaty of Tilsit, the disappearance of all other Powers save France and Russia, and the conspiracy of the two Emperors against the freedom of the rest of the world, might well have daunted even Pitt's lofty courage. But Canning met the new peril with dauntless spirit; and the speed and decisive force of his counter-stroke at Copenhagen showed that on the side of England, Napoleon was confronted by an opponent with a touch of his own genius. It was with equal daring, but more doubtful wisdom, that Canning framed the second Order in Council,



levelled at neutrals, which drove the United States into war with England.

Castlereagh, too, strengthened the resolute purpose of the Cabinet to maintain the war. His statesmanship had many defects. He lacked Canning's literary gifts and oratorical power; he belonged, indeed, to the inarticulate type of statesman, and is a standing proof of the fact that an almost unintelligible speaker may yet be a great power under a Parliamentary system of government. But he had a cool brain, a keen intellectual vision, an unshaken courage, and a masterful will; and though he finally broke with Canning, and the breach destroyed the Cabinet to which they both belonged, yet he too constituted one of the great personal forces in the statesmanship of England during this period.

Trafalgar, it is to be added, had not quite purged the imagination of the English statesmen of that day of the terror of invasion. They were persuaded that Napoleon would gather up the broken and scattered navies of Europe, and once more weave them into some gigantic fleet, and so renew with England the great contest for supremacy on the sea. And they had some evidence in support of their fears. Long afterwards, at St. Helena, Napoleon said it was part of the agreed policy of Tilsit that "the whole maritime forces of the Continent were to be employed against England; and they would muster," he added, "180 sail of the line. In a few

years this force could be raised to 250. With the aid of such a fleet and my numerous flotilla, it was by no means impossible to lead a European army to London. . . . Such was my plan at bottom, which only failed of success from the faults committed in the Spanish war."

Napoleon's St. Helena arithmetic and history need, of course, to be generously discounted. He talked on stilts. His imagination spoke, not his memory, still less his conscience. But it is a curious fact that a secret memorandum submitted to the British Cabinet in January 1808—three years after Trafalgar, that is—reckoned the fleet at the command of Napoleon at no less than 121 sail of the line. What may be called the right wing of this fleet consisted of the navies of the Northern Powers; and the expeditions to Copenhagen and to Sweden were directed against this section of Napoleon's far-spread naval combination, and, as a matter of fact, destroyed it. The Walcheren expedition was intended to shatter the centre of that somewhat shadowy navy. And, by aiding the Spanish revolt, both Castlereagh and Canning believed they would destroy what may be described as the left wing of Napoleon's new combinations.

The naval effects of the Peninsular War are not usually dwelt upon. Yet that war plucked out of Napoleon's grasp not only the Spanish and Portuguese fleets, which Napoleon himself reckoned at fifty

ships of the line; it directly led to the capture of the French ships escaped from Trafalgar, and since that battle lying in Cadiz, and to the surrender of a powerful Russian squadron in the Tagus. Out of the 180 ships of the line which, as we have seen, Napoleon reckoned the Treaty of Tilsit put at his disposal, at least 100 within two years were captured, destroyed, or turned into the allies of England. And the Peninsular War cost Napoleon fifty out of that hundred, thus justifying the forecast of the English Government.

Both political parties in England thus welcomed the appeal from Spain for help; Ministers because it fell within the lines of their settled policy; the Opposition because it satisfied their ideal of a national uprising. The general British public, it is hardly necessary to add, was kindled to a flame of generous sympathy at the spectacle of a nation deserted by its king, and practically without a government or an army, yet rising in audacious revolt against the master of so many legions.

British help for Spain, however, had, in its first steps, much more of generosity than of wisdom. Hostile operations against Spain and her colonies were, of course, at once suspended, and all Spanish prisoners of war were freed. But Spain was a mosaic of local juntas, all at the moment independent, all in a mood of the highest rage, and all waging war on their own account. British agents were despatched

to all these, with offers of help. When the Spanish imagination is left to assess its own worth and needs, its arithmetic easily expands into quite surprising proportions. Thus arms were asked for armies which existed only in the dreams of excited patriots, and money for operations which were unknown to any sane art of war.

The Junta of Oporto, for example, which had raised a modest force of 4000 men, asked for arms and equipment for 40,000; and much the same modesty of request existed over the whole area of the Peninsula. With the treasury of England to draw upon, and the self-denial of self-appointed juntas to determine the scale of the drafts, the stream of British assistance flowing into the Peninsula naturally assumed great volume. In twelve months England had given to Spain £2,000,000 in gold, 150 pieces of field-artillery, 200,000 muskets, 15,000 barrels of gunpowder, 40,000 tents, 10,000 sets of camp equipage, 92,000 uniforms, 356,000 sets of accoutrements, &c., &c. Equipment sufficient, in brief, for an army equal to that of Xerxes was emptied on the Peninsula.

"There is a way of conferring a favour," says Napier, "which appears like accepting one; and this secret being discovered by the English Cabinet, the Spaniards soon demanded as a right what they had at first solicited as a boon." But these lavish supplies found very unwise employment. The British muskets sent to Spain were left to rust, or were even sold to the



enemy; the uniforms seldom reached the soldier's back; the gold disappeared in the gaping pockets of corrupt officials. Enough British arms were sent into the Peninsula to well-nigh equip the entire population. Yet, says Napier, "it is a fact that from the beginning to the end of the war, an English musket was rarely seen in the hands of a Spanish soldier."

The typical Spaniard, of course, had, and has, many virtues and not a few vices. Punctuality is an unknown grace with him; delay a habit; improvidence a law. He is curiously patient under privations, but to insult he has the alarming sensitiveness of a modern chemical explosive. Insult, indeed, stings him more deeply than injury, and hate is a more enduring spring of action than the sense of duty or the enthusiasm kindled by a noble cause. Nothing can well be more gaping than his credulity, nothing more jealous than his suspiciousness; and his vanity is on a scale which rivals even his credulity or his jealousy. The Spanish Juntas believed they could overthrow Napoleon without any help from England; nay, they succeeded, at the very end, in persuading themselves that they had performed this surprising feat!

The various provincial councils, taught by many disasters, were at last persuaded that, if Spain was not to remain a mosaic of spluttering and unrelated revolts, the scattered and local insurrections must be knitted into some common scheme of war. So they joined in appointing a Central Junta, which held its sessions

at Aranjuez. Spain has produced, and survived, more forms of bad government than perhaps any other country of Europe; but probably the worst instrument of government that ever emerged, even in Spanish history, was this Central Junta. It consisted of thirty persons, twenty-eight of them being priests or nobles. Its members spent much time in discussing the titles by which they were themselves to be adorned and the salaries they were to receive. Then, having re-established the Inquisition and appointed sundry saints to the command of various armies—both saints and armies being about equally invisible to the eye of secular common sense—the members of this remarkable Junta felt they had done enough for the salvation of Spain. Their remaining energies were spent in demanding huge supplies, for which no use could be found, from Great Britain, and in perplexing as much as possible the operations of British generals.

But, with all its defects, the Spanish outbreak gave England the opportunity of meeting the all-conquering legions of France in the shock of land-battle under the most favourable conditions; so it marks a new stage in the great struggle with Napoleon.

## CHAPTER IV

### A NEW FIELD OF WAR

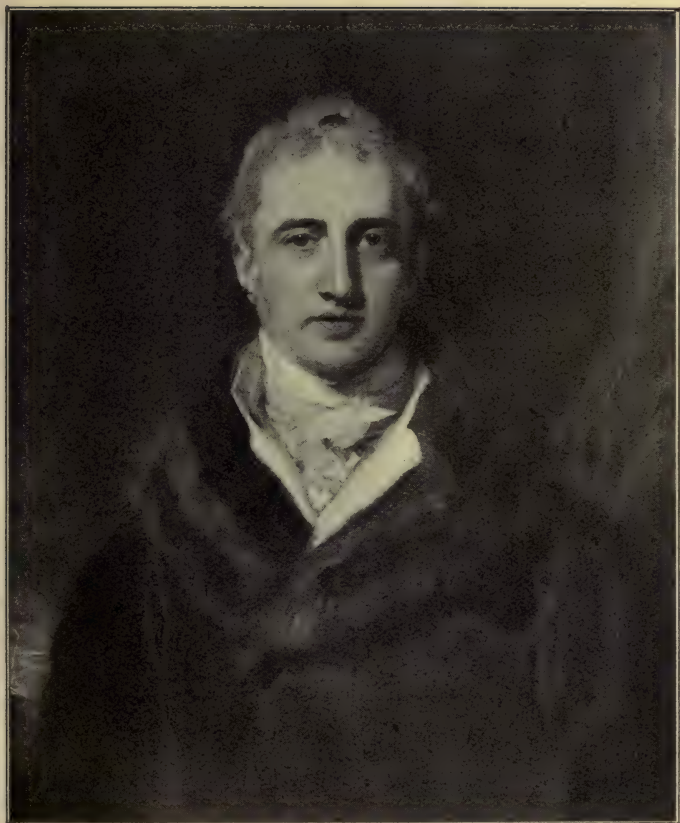
THE Peninsula, the stage on which this new act in the great drama was to be played, is, roughly, a square 500 miles on each face, washed by the sea on all sides save on the eastern half of its northern face, where it is united to France; the Pyrenees, with their lofty peaks, their wild defiles, and their deep valleys, standing as a barrier betwixt France and Spain.

Portugal is—again roughly—a strip 100 miles wide along the Atlantic sea-board, the western face of the great square of the Peninsula. A tangled skein of hills parallel with the sea-coast forms the dividing-line betwixt Spain and Portugal. Portugal was thus an ideal base for operations against the French in Spain. It lay along the western flank of Spain, open to the sea along its whole extent, its coast-line pierced by three navigable rivers—the Douro, the Tagus, and the Guadiana—while the barrier of eastern hills formed a shaggy screen, behind which a tempest of war could be gathered, to burst north or south on the bewildered French as

might be judged best. The first step was obviously to drive the French out of Portugal, and make that country the base of British operations.

A strange succession of blunders, however, marked, on the British side, the opening stages of the Peninsular War. There were at the moment 120,000 French troops in the Peninsula; beyond the Pyrenees were 400,000 veterans, the victors of Jena and of Friedland, ready to be hurled by the overwhelming military genius of Napoleon on any intruder in Spain itself. In that country there was a wide-spread and distracted guerilla warfare, but practically no regular army. Napoleon was by no means disposed to under-rate his enemies. He took the Spanish revolt, when he had once seen its scale, quite seriously; and, to quote Napier, "the conqueror of Europe was as fearful of making false movements before this army of peasants as if Frederick the Great had been in his front." Yet Napoleon's sober estimate of the whole body of insurrectionary forces in Spain was, that it was incapable of beating 25,000 French in good position. "The Spanish," he said, "are the merest canaille." "Spain," he declared again, "had only some 15,000 soldiers left, with some old blockhead to command them." When stepping on to such a field against such an enemy, and with allies so despicable, England might be expected to concentrate its whole strength on the task, and to commence operations with clear plans and on a great scale.





THE MARQUIS OF LONDONDERRY (VISCOUNT CASTLEREAGH)

*From the painting by SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A., in the National  
Portrait Gallery*



But this was by no means the case. More than 10,000 good troops, under Moore, were lying idle in their transports in a Swedish port; 10,000 more were being wasted in Sicily. Yet another small army, under General Spencer, was practically derelict in the Mediterranean. There remained a force of some 9500 men about to sail from Cork for a raid on the Spanish colonies; and this modest body of troops was now placed under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley for operations in the Peninsula. Castlereagh had at least one faculty of a statesman, the gift of choosing fit instruments, and, by a flash of genius, he had selected Wellesley for this important command.

His Indian fame marked him out as the natural leader of the English expedition to the Peninsula—an expedition intended to drive the French out of Portugal, and use that country, with its long stretch of sea-coast, as the base of operations against the French in Spain.

But the British Cabinet, while despatching this expedition under a leader so competent and for a purpose so clear, took two steps admirably calculated to defeat their own designs. They divided their forces by sending 10,000 men under Spencer to Cadiz, and they despatched Sir Harry Burrard to supersede Wellesley, and Sir Hew Dalrymple to supersede Sir Harry Burrard. Thus the great struggle in the Peninsula was begun, on the English side, with divided forces and under distracted leadership.

On July 12, 1808, the expedition under Sir Arthur Wellesley sailed from Cork. Hill, Craufurd, Fane, Bowes, Ferguson, were in command of brigades. The troops included some regiments destined to win great fame in the Peninsula—the 50th, the 71st, the 91st, the 95th, &c. Wellesley himself pushed on ahead in a fast frigate to Corunna and put himself in communication with the Galician Junta. He was told bluntly that Spain wanted English money and arms, but not English soldiers. Thence he sailed to Oporto, where it was arranged that 5000 Portuguese troops should join him as soon as he landed, near the mouth of the Tagus.

For seventy miles north of Lisbon Rock, the Portuguese coast is one of the most unfriendly in the world. The rivers have shallow, impracticable bars; the coast is rocky; a terrific surf rolls ceaselessly in from the Atlantic. But a little north of where the Peniche peninsula juts out from the mainland, like the bulbous nose from a drunkard's face, the river Mondego offers an uncertain and perilous landing-place. Here the first British soldiers in the Peninsula were landed. The weather was fine, yet the breakers rolled shoreward so heavily that it took Wellesley five days to land his troops and supplies, and it was clear that, if a south wind arose, retreat by the sea would be cut off. Spencer joined him before the landing was completed, bringing the army up to 12,300 men. The Portuguese reinforcements proved almost



as unreal as Falstaff's men in buckram. Freire, the Portuguese general, had indeed an uncertain number of men under his flag, and promptly drew 5000 stands of arms from Wellesley for their use; but he refused to join the British in any combined operation, and actually demanded that the English general should feed his troops!

Wellesley, with characteristic composure, left Freire out of his calculations, and addressed himself to the task of driving Junot—who had 25,000 good troops against his 12,300—out of Portugal. He must hold to the coast in order to keep near his supplies; he must strike at Lisbon, the seat of Junot's power. He pushed on, therefore, southward by a road running parallel with the coast to Leira. Junot had despatched two of his divisional generals, Loison and Laborde, moving by separate lines, to meet and crush the invader. On August 11 Wellesley found Laborde before him at Obidos. On the 15th the first skirmish took place. Some companies of the 95th and 60th found some strong French pickets in their front, closed roughly upon them, and drove them headlong. Having got the French on the run, the British followed with reckless valour, till they found themselves charging Laborde's whole force, and were called off with a loss of twenty-seven men and two officers. "The affair," says Wellesley, "was unpleasant, because it was quite useless, and was occasioned contrary to orders, solely by the im-

prudence of the officer and the dash and eagerness of the men." But the incident at least proved the ready, if somewhat hot-headed, fighting quality of the British rank and file.

Laborde fell back to Roliça. Loison was at Alcoentre. Roliça, Alcoentre, and Lisbon formed roughly the three points of an isosceles triangle. If Laborde drew towards Lisbon, he was abandoning Loison; if he kept his communications with Loison, he ran the risk of being cut off from Lisbon. He must fight; and on August 17 at Roliça took place the first serious combat of the Peninsular War.

Roliça was a village standing on a high tableland, rising from the floor of a valley sharply defined by lines of parallel hills. Laborde held the village strongly; but a mile in its rear was a precipitous ridge called Zambugeira, three-quarters of a mile long, uniting the lateral hills and forming a strong second position for the French. Wellesley's plan was to thrust his left—consisting of two brigades of infantry, with six guns and some Rifles, under Ferguson—along the crest of the lateral hill, till the village was turned, then the French must fall back or be cut off. A smaller force under Trant moved to turn the French left; Wellesley himself with the main body of the British advanced on Laborde's centre. Laborde was quickly pushed from Roliça, but, covering himself with a heavy fire of artillery, he fell back to his second line. Wellesley proceeded to

thrust him from this by exactly the same tactics, Ferguson moving on the crest of the hill past the French right, Hill and Nightingale pressing on his front. Here came the gallant and costly blunder of the day.

Laborde's front was of singular strength. Three steep watercourses, shaggy with ilex bushes, slippery with waterworn rocks—ravines for goats rather than paths for troops—seamed the steep front of the hill. The 9th and 29th were launched against the position before Ferguson's turning movement had made itself felt. The English leaders, that is, were too eager, and the English privates, it may be added, were quite as eager as even their generals. The attacking regiments were to have moved up the right-hand ravine, but the centre watercourse seemed to lead most directly upon the enemy's position, and, with the instinct which takes a British soldier by the shortest road to his foe, the two regiments plunged into this ravine. It rose sharply, was rough with broken rocks, and so narrow that, in places, only three men could move abreast. Their officers leading, the red-coats swarmed eagerly up. The ravine, as it reached the crest, narrowed to a mere crack. In the bushes that formed a screen at its head the French riflemen lay thick.

Colonel Lake of the 29th was leading, an officer of brilliant promise. Suddenly a hundred red jets of flame shot out of the bushes; many of the British fell, amongst them Lake. As the 29th charged past



their dying colonel, he was still calling, "Forward! Forward!" The English broke through to the crest, breathless and disordered, and before they could re-form a French battalion ran forward with great courage, delivered a shattering volley, and broke clean through the half-formed 29th. A regiment rent asunder by the impact of a hostile charge is usually ruined; some sixty men of the 29th, including its Major, were, as a matter of fact, made prisoners. But the gallant 29th, fighting hand to hand in irregular clusters, held their ground stubbornly until the 9th coming up the ravine and charging with great fury, the crest was won, though Stewart, the colonel of the 9th, shared Lake's fate.

By this time Ferguson was turning Laborde's right, the 5th had come up the true ravine on the left front of the French, and Laborde yielded the fight. Marching all night, he fell back on Loison, leaving the Torres Vedras road and Lisbon uncovered.

Roliça is not merely the first, it is also the most typical fight of the Peninsula. The French excelled in nimbleness of tactics, the British in dogged and straightforward fighting. The struggle, it may be added, was, for the numbers engaged, singularly bloody. The number of troops actually thrown into the contest on both sides did not exceed 5000; yet the English loss reached nearly 500, the French exceeded 600. Well-nigh every fourth man in the forces actually engaged was killed or wounded.



## CHAPTER V

### VIMIERO AND THE CONVENTION OF CINTRA

WELLESLEY would have moved direct on Lisbon, but in the evening news came that General Anstruther, with his brigade, and a fleet of storeships, had anchored off Peniche. To cover their landing, Wellesley moved towards the coast, and took up a position at Vimiero. Junot, on his part, gathering up all his available strength, marched at speed from Lisbon, drew under his standards the divisions of Loison and Laborde, and on the 19th reached Torres Vedras, nine miles distant from Vimiero, where Wellesley stood. The French general was so strong in cavalry that he was able to draw his horsemen like a screen across his front, and conceal his own strength and movements from Wellesley's keen eye. On the 20th, however, the British general had formed his plans. He would push betwixt Junot and the sea-coast, and cut him off from Lisbon. But at this moment Sir Harry Burrard, commander No. 2, arrived off the coast, and Wellesley had to suspend his movements and take his superior officer's instructions.

Burrard was a gallant soldier but a poor general.

He was old, his imagination was frozen, the situation was strange, the responsibility great, and he told Wellesley bluntly he would not stir till Moore arrived with reinforcements. Wellesley urged that Junot, if not attacked, would certainly attack, and would thus be able to choose the time and place of battle which best suited himself. But nothing moved Burrard, and Wellesley returned to his camp in disgust. Junot, however, settled the question of strategy. He had to choose betwixt victory over the British or revolt at Lisbon, and the time for choice was of the briefest. At the very moment Burrard arrested Wellesley's movement, Junot was marching to attack the English. All night he pushed through the long defile that led to Vimiero; at seven o'clock on the morning of the 21st he was within four miles of the British position; at ten o'clock the fight of Vimiero was raging.

The news that Junot was moving was brought about midnight to Wellesley, who—it is an amusing detail to learn—was found, with his entire staff, sitting back to back on a long table in the rough quarters he occupied, “swinging their legs.” Wellesley took the news coolly, and refused to disturb his troops. The French, he guessed, after a long night march, would not attack at once, but would wait till morning.

At Vimiero a range of hills from the north, hitherto running parallel to the coast, curves round at a sharp angle, and runs almost due west to the sea-board.

The river Maceira breaks through the range at the very angle of the curving hills. Vimiero stands in front of the gap in the hills made by the river; in front of Vimiero, again, is a lower and isolated hill. This hill formed Wellesley's centre, and was held by



Fane's and Anstruther's brigades. On the heights in their rear was the reserve under Hill. The ridge swinging sharply round to the west formed the British right, and was held by the brigades under Craufurd, Ferguson, Bowes, Nightingale, and Acland; the left,

which consisted of a line of steep hills, with a sudden valley like a trench running at their base, was lightly held by the 40th regiment and some pickets.

Junot, a fine though impulsive soldier, saw Wellesley's battle-line before him: it formed the two sides of an obtuse triangle, with the hill on which stood the brigades of Fane and Anstruther at the vertex. Wellesley's right was strongly held; his left seemed almost naked of troops, and the deep ravine which made it unassailable by direct attack could not be detected from the point where Junot sat on his horse studying the English position. With swift decision Junot launched Laborde against Wellesley's centre. Brennier led the main attack against the left, with Loison in support; while Kellerman, with a strong body of grenadiers and 1300 cavalry, formed the reserve. Wellesley read Junot's plan, and promptly marched the three brigades of Ferguson, Nightingale, and Bowes across the angle of his battle-line from the right wing to the left.

Laborde came on boldly, a mass of 6000 men, with a fringe of artillery fire—an edge of white smoke and darting flame—running before his columns. On the crest of the hill stood the 50th in line, with some Rifles. The 86th, the leading French regiment, plunged into the fight with fine courage, and the Rifles, who were thrown out as skirmishers, fell back before them. The 50th, standing grimly in line,



grew impatient at seeing the Rifles fall back. The steady line began to vibrate with passion, an angry shout went up—"D—n them! Charge, charge!" Fane rode to and fro before his men to steady them. "Don't be too eager, men," he said coolly. But when the solid mass of the French column was visible over the crest, he gave the word to charge, and the 50th went forward with great vehemence. The French, a veteran regiment, for a moment stood firm, and the bayonets clashed together with a far-heard ring. But the 50th were not to be denied, and after a moment's fierce wrestle, the French were driven in wild confusion and with much slaughter down the slope.

A still more vehement attack on the centre was made by Kellerman's grenadiers. They were choice soldiers, splendidly led, and they mounted the hill at the quick-step with loud cries, and actually pushed back the 43rd, which stood in their path. Rallying, however, the 43rd ran in again upon the French, slew 120 grenadiers with the bayonet, and sent the whole mass whirling in dust and confusion to the bottom of the hill. A single company of the 20th dragoons constituted Wellesley's cavalry, and these were now sent at the broken French. As they rode at the gallop past Wellesley, his staff involuntarily clapped their hands in admiration. It was a handful of horsemen charging an army! Taylor led the charge, and, pushing too fiercely into the broken

infantry, was slain. The handful of English horsemen, riding eagerly in pursuit, were in turn charged by an overwhelming force of French cavalry, and almost destroyed.

The French attack on the British left fared even worse than that on the centre. The first column, under Brennier, found itself barred by the deep ravine which formed a natural ditch in front of the British position; the second column, under Solignac, marched in a wide curve round the head of the ravine, and climbed the hill with speed, expecting to take the British in reverse. But the French general had under-estimated Wellesley's tactics. Three British brigades, under Ferguson, Nightingale, and Bowes, stood drawn in steady lines across his path; a fourth, under Craufurd, was within striking distance of his flank.

Ferguson, a fiery Scotch soldier, attacked instantly and with resolution. The 36th, 40th, and 71st formed his line, and with one long level line of shining bayonets they closed on the enemy. Here again the French for a moment stood firm; and in a bayonet charge pushed home, where soldier closes on soldier along a wide front, the slaughter is quick and deadly. The foremost rank of the Frenchmen fell, to quote the words of an actor in the fight, "like grass before the mower;" 300 French grenadiers slain by the bayonet were counted afterwards lying along the slope where the lines met. Solignac himself fell

wounded, his column was broken into fragments, six of his guns were captured, and Ferguson, leaving the 82nd and 71st to guard the captured guns, pressed eagerly on in pursuit.

Suddenly on his flank out of the smoke-filled ravine emerged a solid French column, coming on at the quick-step, with drums beating, and officers, sword in hand, urging their men forward with fiery gestures. It was Brennier's brigade, that had at last found its way across the ravine. The 82nd and 71st, taken by surprise, for a moment were flung back and the guns recaptured. But rallying, the British charged afresh, drove back the French, re-took the guns, Brennier himself being made a prisoner.

The French were now defeated at every point. Ferguson's lines were closing round Solignac. Wellesley knew that Junot's last reserves had been flung into the fight, while one-half the British army had not been engaged. The road to Torres Vedras was left open by the retreat of the French, and they could be cut off from Lisbon. But at this juncture Sir Harry Burrard, who had come on the scene of the battle some time before, but who had not interfered with Wellesley's movements, chose to assume command, and ordered all pursuit of the enemy to cease. Ferguson, with Solignac's broken regiments under his very hand, was called back; the movement along the Torres Vedras road was arrested.

In vain Wellesley urged pursuit. "Sir Harry,"



he said, "now is your time to advance. The enemy are completely beaten. We shall be in Lisbon in three days." But Burrard held that enough had been done. A French army had been overthrown, with the loss of thirteen guns, several hundred prisoners, and nearly 3000 killed and wounded. Wellesley, indeed, saw that Junot might be not merely defeated, but destroyed; but he failed to move Burrard's colder and more timid nature, and he turned away, saying to his aide-de-camp, "Well, then, there is nothing for us soldiers to do here except to go and shoot red-legged partridges!" Burrard's contribution to the battle was that single unhappy order which arrested the British pursuit and left the victory incomplete. The next morning Sir Hew Dalrymple appeared on the scene, and Burrard's brief and ignoble command ended. The astonished British army had thus undergone three changes of commander within twenty-four hours!

Vimiero is memorable, not merely as being the first battle in the Peninsular War, but as the first in which the characteristic tactics of the French and the English were tried, and on an adequate scale, against each other. Croker, in his "Journal," tells how Wellesley spent the last night before embarking for the Peninsula with him. Wellesley fell into a deep reverie, and was rallied on his silence. "Why, to tell the truth," he said, "I was thinking of the French that I am going to fight. I have not seen them since



the campaign in Flanders, when they were capital soldiers, and a dozen years of successes must have made them better still. They have beaten all the world, and are supposed to be invincible. They have, besides, it seems, a new system, which has outmanœuvred and overwhelmed all the armies of Europe. But no matter. My die is cast; they may overwhelm me, but I don't think they will outmanœuvre me;—in the first place, because I am not afraid of them, as everybody else appears to be; and secondly, because if what I hear of their system of manœuvres be true, I think it a false one against troops steady enough, as I hope mine will be, to receive them with the bayonet. I suspect that all the Continental armies were more than half-beaten before the battle was begun. I, at least, will not be frightened beforehand."

Wellesley had guessed the flaw in French tactics. They uniformly attacked in column, and such an attack, if pushed resolutely home, is, except against troops of the highest quality, overwhelming. The narrow front of the column gives it the rending power of a wedge; its weight and mass supply almost irresistible momentum. The column, too, with the menace of its charge and its massive depth of files, impresses the imagination of the body against which it is launched, and overthrows it more by moral than even physical pressure. But Wellesley knew the British soldier. Whether from mere defect of

imagination, or from native and rough-fibred valour, British soldiers would meet coolly, in slender extended line, the onfall of the most massive column. And if in such a conflict the line stands firm, it has a fatal advantage over the column. Its far-stretching front of fire crushes the head, and galls the flanks of the attacking body. One musket, in a word, is answered and overborne by the fire of ten; and under such conditions the column almost inevitably goes to pieces.

Napier, a soldier familiar with battle, paints in vivid colours the experiences of a column met by steady troops in line. "The repugnance of men to trample on their own dead and wounded, the cries and groans of the latter, and the whistling of cannon-shots as they tear open the ranks, produce disorder, especially in the centre of attacking columns, which, blinded by smoke, unsteadfast of footing, bewildered by words of command coming from a multitude of officers crowded together, can neither see what is taking place, nor advance, nor retreat, without increasing the confusion. No example of courage can be useful, no moral effect produced by the spirit of individuals, except upon the head, which is often firm, and even victorious, when the rear is flying in terror."

Marshal Bugeaud has described, from the French standpoint, the same scene: "About 1000 yards from the English line," he says, "the men become excited, speak to one another, and hurry their march; the column begins to be a little confused. The English

remain quite silent, with ordered arms, and from their steadiness appear to be a long red wall. This steadiness invariably produces an effect on the young soldier. Very soon we get nearer, shouting 'Vive l'Empereur! en avant! à la bayonette!' Shakos are raised on the muzzles of the muskets, the column begins to double. The agitation produces a tumult; shots are fired as we advance. The English line remains still, silent and immovable, with ordered arms, even when we are only 300 paces distant, and it appears to ignore the storm about to break.

"The contrast is striking; in our inmost thoughts each feels that the enemy is a long time in firing, and that this fire, reserved for so long, will be very unpleasant when it does come. Our ardour cools. The moral power of steadiness which nothing shakes (even if it be only in appearance) over disorder which stupefies itself with noise, overcomes our minds. At this moment of intense excitement the English wall shoulders arms, an indescribable feeling roots many of our men to the ground; they begin to fire. The enemy's steady concentrated volleys sweep our ranks; decimated, we turn round, seeking to recover our equilibrium; then three deafening cheers break the silence of our opponents; at the third they are on us and pushing our disorganised flight. But, to our great surprise, they do not push their advantage beyond a hundred yards, retiring calmly to their lines to await a second attack."

Another gallant soldier of the Peninsula, Leith Hay, describes not so much the defect in the method of French attack as the limit in the fighting quality of French troops. "In mounting steeply defended by troops," he says, "in making attacks in large bodies where a great crisis is at issue, in forcing on under fire until all difficulties but the personal, the close conflict with his opponent, has been overcome, the French soldier appears to be unequalled. But when perseverance has placed him on equal ground, when he apparently has obtained a chance of successfully terminating his attack, he becomes no longer formidable, and appears paralysed by the immediate presence of his opponents—a strange and inexplicable result of so much gallantry, such gaiety, so much recklessness of danger. It is only to be accounted for by the supposition that the physical composition of the Frenchman does not permit the effervescence to subsist beyond a certain exertion, that, if unchecked, might have continued buoyant, but, being resolutely met, becomes depressed and vanquished."

Wellesley had certainly shown in these first contests with the French that he was not "frightened beforehand;" and thrice in the contest of Vimiero his soldiers had met in line and crushed the attack of the French in column. British methods thus had been fairly tried against French methods, and the result was written in blood-red characters on the field at Vimiero.



Dalrymple hesitated betwixt Burrard's policy and Wellesley's for a whole day, but decided to advance on the 23rd. At midday on the 23rd, however, when the British were about to move, a cluster of French horsemen, escorting a flag of truce, rode into the lines. It was Kellerman with a proposal for an armistice until a convention should be drawn up for the evacuation of Portugal. Dalrymple welcomed the proposal. It seemed to promise the fruits of victory without the perils of another battle. Wellesley, with a more soldierly instinct, wished to press on without pause. Junot, he believed, would not have proposed a convention if he had any hope of holding Portugal.

Dalrymple, however, had much more of the caution of age than of the energy of youth. He accepted the French proposals, and what is known as the Convention of Cintra followed. The French were to evacuate Portugal, and, with all their artillery, arms, and baggage, were to be transported in British ships to France. One article of the Convention stipulated that plunder was not to be carried off by the French; but to persuade a French army to surrender its booty was a feat beyond the ingenuity of British diplomacy. The French had stripped churches, art galleries, palaces, and warehouses of everything portable, and were loaded with booty. The troops who had limped naked into Lisbon proposed to sail from it with baggage enough to load a fleet of transports. Junot himself demanded five transports for his own

"private property." With much distracted shrieking, and some actual scuffling, the French were compelled to disgorge much of their plunder, but they yet contrived to carry off a vast amount of booty.

The Convention of Cintra gave Portugal, with its capital and all its strong places, into the hands of the British, and Junot's troops, that had entered Lisbon as conquerors, were convoyed ignobly in British transports back to France. But in Great Britain itself the news of the Convention was received with angry disgust. It called forth, indeed, a louder explosion of wrath than if the entire British army had been driven to re-embark, or had even been destroyed! At Baylen, Spanish peasants had compelled a French marshal and his army to surrender as prisoners; at Cintra, British generals had allowed a beaten French army to march off with what seemed to be the honours of war and the plunder of a country.

A court of inquiry, consisting of seven British generals, sat at Chelsea, and spent six weeks taking evidence on the subject. Wellesley, Burrard, and Dalrymple were practically put on their trial. Six generals approved and one disapproved of the armistice; four generals approved of the Convention, three disapproved. The report of the court of inquiry dwells with wide-eyed astonishment on "the extraordinary circumstances under which two new commanding generals arrived from the ocean and joined

the army, the one during, and the other immediately after, a battle, and these necessarily superseding each other, and both the original commander, within the space of twenty-four hours." The world still shares that wonder of the six major-generals who formed the court of inquiry. The inquiry, however, made it clear that Wellesley had been fatally hampered by the elderly and leisurely generals put over him, and he emerged from the trial with reputation undamaged.

The Convention, with all its defects, was undoubtedly a blow to the French, a substantial advantage for the British. Napoleon summed up the situation in a sentence: "I was going," he says, "to send Junot before a council of war, when, fortunately, the English tried their generals, and saved me the pain of punishing an old friend."

## CHAPTER VI

### MOORE AND NAPOLEON

BETWIXT the Convention of Cintra and the appearance of Napoleon in person with his veterans in Spain there was a curious pause in the great drama of the Peninsular War. The French had fallen back to the Ebro. Joseph, a king without subjects and without a capital, could plan nothing and do nothing. There were still nearly 80,000 French soldiers at his disposal, and there was really no force in Spain that could have stood before his stroke. But the new King of Spain was haunted by the sense of a nation in revolt, a nation in which, in noble and in peasant alike, there was no other feeling towards him but that of furious hate. "Prudence," he wrote apologetically to his imperious brother, "does not permit three corps, the strongest of which is only 18,000 men, to separate to a greater distance than six days' march, in the midst of 11,000,000 people in a state of hostility." The English, it is true, held Portugal; but the British mind cannot interest itself in two subjects at once; and English public opinion was much more intent on discovering who ought to



be hanged for the Convention of Cintra than on the question of what ought to be done to push the French out of Spain. The British army in Portugal had lost its three generals, and had not yet gained a fourth. Spain itself was a bewildered and bewildering tangle of follies, hatreds, jealousies, distracted ambitions, and semi-idiotic dreams.

The British Cabinet, indeed, had begun to organise, on a more rational plan, its agents in Spain. A single responsible agent was appointed to each province, with Stuart at Madrid as chief of the civil agents. But nothing could infuse method or sanity into Spanish affairs. A Central Junta existed; it passed decrees requiring itself to be addressed as "Majesty," and granting spacious titles and generous salaries to all its members. But it exercised no real control over the provincial juntas. Stuart described it, after long experience, as "never having made a single exertion for the public good." No provincial junta would assist another, or permit its troops to march out of its own boundaries. Sometimes, indeed, the juntas were trembling on the point of civil war amongst themselves; sometimes they were dazzled by wild visions of foreign conquest. The only art in which they shone was the art of infinite and intolerable delay. The single active sentiment they cherished towards their ally, England, was an ardent desire for its gold.

Spanish generals were worthy of Spanish juntas.

"They knew," says Napier, "so little of war, that before their incapacity was understood, their errors, too gross for belief, contributed to their safety." They were all equally independent, equally ignorant, and equally unreliable. "No one general," says Napier, "knew what another had done, was doing, or intended to do;" and there was no error possible in war of which they were not guilty. And yet juntas and generals—and, it is painful to add, the British Cabinet — shared in the most ridiculous expectations of what was about to happen. The French, every one believed, were in retreat. Victorious Spaniards would soon be marching through the Pyrenees. France was to be invaded. The part the English were to play in this imaginary drama was to be that of mere benevolent spectators. When Moore's army entered Spain, its officers were told repeatedly by the Spanish, "We are obliged to our friends the English; we thank them for their goodwill. We shall escort them through France to Calais; the journey will be pleasanter than a long voyage. They will not have the trouble of fighting the French, and we shall be pleased to have them as spectators of our victories!"

Spain, in fact, was a realm of dreams—of rose-tinted dreams, with a strain of lunacy running through them. Only Cervantes could have done justice to the pride, the follies, the distractions, the lunatic

hopes, the yet more lunatic ambitions, that filled Spain with their fever at this moment.

There remained one keen, strong, masterful brain that was under no illusion about Spanish affairs, and that had a perfectly clear plan of action in relation to them. Napoleon understood perfectly the shock which the surrender at Baylen and the defeat at Vimiero had given, not merely to his fame, but to his power. The rising in Spain was a lesson to the whole Continent, with very mischievous suggestions. In vain had he overthrown kings if it were shown that the peoples could overthrow him. Austria, Prussia, Italy, might learn that lesson and apply it. The Spanish conflagration must be trampled out thoroughly, and the time for doing it was brief. For if the war in Spain were prolonged, Prussia might rise, Austria sullenly betake itself again to arms, and the Continent catch fire!

Napoleon's plan was to march into Spain an irresistible military force. There were 500,000 troops, familiar with victory and in the highest state of efficiency, under the French eagles on the Continent. He drew from these eight great corps-d'armée, numbering in all more than 200,000 men. They included his best troops, with the far-famed and invincible Guard itself. They were led by his most trusted marshals—Ney and Soult, Victor and St. Cyr, Mortier and Lannes. These vast and disciplined columns moved steadily towards the Pyrenees, form-

ing such a tempest of war as had never yet burst over Spain. With that curious attention to minute and apparently insignificant detail which characterised Napoleon, he took pains to kindle the imagination of his veterans as they entered on this new campaign. As they marched through the chief cities they were feasted and entertained; flowers, by his orders, were flung on the tramping battalions; theatrical representations cheered them when they halted at night. He directed his Minister of War to have songs composed to be sung to his troops having for their theme "the liberty of the sea." The soldiers must be persuaded that their bayonets were to avenge Trafalgar, and they were to overthrow the fleets of "perfidious Albion" on the plains of Andalusia or in the wild mountain-passes of Asturia! "You must have three kinds of songs made," Napoleon added gravely, "so that the soldiers may not hear the same songs twice."

Napoleon, moreover, took care to educate public opinion, and to "educate" it in characteristic fashion by deceiving it. On November 19—four days, that is, before the battle of Tudela was fought—he wrote to his Minister, Champigny: "Send off an intelligent courier who will spread the report that Spain has submitted, or is on the point of submitting, completely; that 80,000 Spaniards are already destroyed," &c., &c. Invention, in a word, was to outrun history.



Napoleon had many of the arts and much of the temper of a great stage-manager; but, it may be added, he was decorating with the tinsel of a playwright the terrors of a thunderbolt. These troops, the victors of Austerlitz and of Friedland, directed by the matchless skill and urged by the vehement will of the greatest soldier of his generation, seemed sufficient to overrun twenty Spains. The echoing passes of the Pyrenees were filled with the ceaseless flow of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, a living flood of armed men, glittering with steel, that threatened to submerge Spain as the ancient flood once overwhelmed the inhabited earth. The truth is, Napoleon aimed not merely to stamp out the insurrection in Spain; he wished to startle and overawe the imagination of the world in the process. There was to be something supernatural in the scale and swiftness of his campaign. His blow was to have the impact and the resistlessness of one of the great forces of Nature. All the nations of Europe were to look on and watch the fate which overtook the one nation which dared to lift its hand against the imperial eagles of France.

Napoleon's own rhetoric had a roll as of drums in it, especially when describing his intention as to the wickedly intruding English. "When I shall show myself beyond the Pyrenees," he said, "the leopard in terror will plunge into the ocean to avoid shame, defeat, and death." The "leopard," however, proved

a beast of disappointing temper. It somehow omitted to plunge into the ocean when French bayonets came sparkling through the Pyrenees. As a matter of fact, it was those very bayonets that, in the long-run, hurried back—and in sadly reduced numbers—through the Pyrenees under the stroke of that much-abused leopard's paw!

As a matter of sober history, however, all Napoleon's haughty purposes about Spain might have been realised but for the daring resolve of one English soldier. The armies and generals of Spain were to Napoleon only what chaff is to the flail; they were scattered before his march as grainless husks are driven before a hurricane. But Moore's heroic thrust at Napoleon's communications arrested the march of the French legions and saved Spain—perhaps even saved the Continent as well as Spain.

Moore divides with Wellington the glories of the Peninsular War. It is true Moore commanded in only one campaign. He fought only one battle in the Peninsula, a battle in which he lost his own life. But Wellington would probably have had no opportunity for those six immortal campaigns which drove the French across the Pyrenees and helped to destroy Napoleon, but for that audacious march of Moore, which stayed the rush of Napoleon on Southern Spain, and wrecked the whole plan of his Spanish campaign.

Napoleon crossed the Spanish frontier on Novem-

ber 3; on the 8th he reached Vittoria, and his armies were put in instant movement. The Spanish forces were grouped along the line of the Ebro and over a distance of 200 miles. They formed four armies. Palafox, with 40,000 men, was on the French right, covering Tudela; Castanos was opposite the French centre; Blake, with 40,000 men, covered the Asturias, while as a reserve near Burgos was the army of Estremadura. The Spanish generals, scattered over a wide area of country, without concert with each other, and with something less than 100,000 men, had to oppose Napoleon, who occupied a central position, and was able to put 160,000 men into the battlefield. The result of such a campaign betwixt such combatants was certain.

Napoleon's plan was to march on Burgos, breaking the Spanish line in two, then wheel round on either flank, push one Spanish wing into the sea and the other to the Pyrenees. Soult at Gamonal broke through the Spanish centre, slew 2500 Spaniards and captured Burgos—and all this within fifty hours of leaving Bayonne! Victor at Espinosa destroyed Blake, and that general on November 12 reached Reynosa with 7000 fugitives, "without artillery, without arms, without spirit, and without hope," as Napier tersely puts it. Soult seized Santander, Lefebvre marched on Valladolid, and the north of Spain was overrun.

Napoleon then let loose his magnificent cavalry



over the plains of Leon and Castile, and Castanos fell hastily back from Madrid. On November 23, with 45,000 men, he was hopelessly overthrown at Tudela. Spain was now prostrate, and Napoleon marched straight on Madrid. The Somosierra pass had to be forced, a steep and wild ravine held by 12,000 men and sixteen guns, a position that ought to have been impregnable. Napoleon carried it by one of the most remarkable feats in even his wonderful career. A huge column of French infantry was drawn up to storm the ravine, barred by an army with its artillery. The fire of the skirmishers filled the steep and narrow valley with smoke, a smoke made denser by the eddying mists rolling down from the mountain summits. Napoleon suddenly arrested the infantry, and sent forward the Polish light cavalry of his Guard. At full gallop, with bent heads and plumes blown backward, the gallant horsemen raced up the steep and rugged ascent. The fog concealed them until they broke, a torrent of rushing and armed men, on the astonished Spaniards. The battery was carried, the pass cleared, and 12,000 men yielded an impregnable position to the charge of a few squadrons of light horse.

On December 2 the French were before Madrid, on the 4th that city surrendered. Six weeks had proved sufficient to destroy the armed strength of Spain. Saragossa still stood, ready for a new siege; some 20,000 British troops were moving along the



Portuguese roads to the Spanish frontier ; but practically Spain was overthrown. And to an assemblage of notables in Madrid Napoleon announced, "I will drive the English armies from the Peninsula. There is no obstacle capable of resisting the execution of my will." He proposed to march, in person, straight on Lisbon, while his marshals overran Catalonia, Valencia, and Andalusia. Napoleon had at that moment more than 300,000 men on his muster-rolls in Spain. Madrid was in his hands ; he commanded all the great lines of communication. Before starting on his triumphant march he conferred a new political constitution on Spain, in which he abolished the Inquisition, reduced the number of convents by one-third, and cancelled all feudal rights. "If Spain," he announced, "did not prove submissive, he would give his brother another throne, and put the crown of Spain upon his own head." And there seemed no power that could prevent that surprising performance. But at this moment Moore steps on the stage and changes the course of history.

Moore had nominally 35,000 troops under his command, but they were scattered over a wide area. Many were sick ; he had less than 24,000 in hand when actually in front of the enemy. His instructions were to advance into Spain, enter into communication with the Spanish generals, and frame a common plan of operations with them. A hundred thousand Spanish soldiers, he was told, were in arms.

Burgos was to be the meeting-point of the allied forces. As a matter of fact, these Spanish armies, before Moore reached the scene of action, had vanished like shadows. Burgos was in the hands of the French. And when Moore, marching from Lisbon, with his troops moving along widely separated lines of road, reached Salamanca, he found himself in an open town, only three marches from the French armies, without so much as a Spanish picket to cover his front. Napoleon's tempest of war, too, by this time was sweeping from the Pyrenees towards Madrid.

Perhaps no general was ever before or since in a situation so trying. To advance was madness; to retreat without striking a blow seemed dishonour, a betrayal of Spain and a reproach to England. Moore found himself, too, in a sort of realm of Egyptian darkness. He could get no definite information as to the forces and movements of the enemy. Napoleon, it may be added, was almost as badly served, in spite of his vast and splendid cavalry, as Moore, and, under the belief that the English had fallen back on Portugal, moved straight on to Madrid, leaving his right flank open to Moore. Had he known Moore's position, he would certainly have turned and flung himself with overwhelming force on the British army.

Moore, however, with cool and deliberate daring, had resolved to abandon his communications with Por-

tugal and risk his fate in Spain. It galled his soldierly pride to have marched so far into the heart of Spain, to be within actual reach of the enemy, and yet strike no blow. He could, he reckoned, crush at least a single corps of the enemy, and then fall back to his ships across the Asturian hills. So he resolved to leap on Soult's corps. On December 16 he wrote: "If Marshal Soult is so good as to approach us, we shall be much obliged to him; but if not, we shall march towards him. It will be very agreeable to give a wipé to such a corps."

But presently a larger and yet more audacious policy shaped itself in Moore's brain. The British agents assured him that Madrid would hold stubbornly out against Napoleon, and Moore resolved to push on and strike at Napoleon's communications with France. He would throw himself, in a word, across the French line betwixt Bayonne and Madrid. "I see my situation," Moore wrote in his journal, "and nothing could be worse, for I have no Spanish army to give me the least assistance. Yet I am determined to try our fortune. We have no business here as things are; but being here, it would never do to abandon Spain without a struggle." "The movement I am making," he wrote again, "is of the most dangerous kind. I not only risk to be surrounded every moment by superior forces, but to have my communication intercepted with the Galicias. But I wish it to be known to the whole world that we do

not abandon the Spanish cause till long after the Spaniards have abandoned us." "I mean to proceed," he wrote again, "bridle in hand; for if the bubble bursts and Madrid falls, we shall have to run for it."



## CHAPTER VII

### THE RETREAT TO CORUNNA

MOORE knew by this time that Madrid had fallen, but that did not alter his plans. When Napoleon realised that the daring Englishman was striking at his communications, it was certain he would arrest the southward march of his armies and turn his whole strength on the puny and audacious foe that had attempted such a stroke. But this would—for the moment at least—save the whole south of Spain, and give it time to prepare for defence. It would arrest—if it did not wreck—Napoleon's whole campaign.

Seldom has a commander attempted a more desperate task than that to which Moore now addressed himself. He had an army equal to his own in numbers on his front, another on his left might cut him off from the sea. Napoleon himself, with an overwhelming force, marching at speed from Madrid, would break in upon his right flank. Moore's problem was, by the nicest adjustment of time, to push on far enough to bring upon himself Napoleon's rush, and yet, by nimbleness and speed, to evade that

great soldier's stroke and pluck his own army from destruction. He pushed on, therefore, to strike Soult at Sahagun; and yet, treating the forward march as really a movement of retreat, prepared stores in his rear on the roads leading to the sea-coast.

The effect of Moore's audacious policy was exactly what he calculated. Napoleon learned of Moore's advance on December 21, and acted with lightning-like swiftness of decision. He wrote to Josephine on the 22nd, "I am starting this moment to out-manceuvre the English, who appear to have received their reinforcements, and wish to play the swaggerers." To Ney he said more seriously, "Moore is now the only general fit to contend with me. I shall advance against him in person." "The day wherein we succeed in seeing these English," he added, "will be a day of jubilee for the French army. . . . Ah! that they might be met with to the number of 80,000 or 100,000 men instead of 20,000, that English mothers might feel the horrors of war! All the evils, all the plagues which can afflict the human race come from London!"

Fifty thousand French troops, with the cavalry of the Guard, were on the evening of the 22nd at the foot of the Guadarama hills. The range is wild and rugged; its ravines were choked with snow, and slippery with ice. A tempest, edged with sleet and black with rain-clouds, was scuffling over the frozen hill summits. The French advance-guard was driven

back by the mountain tempests, and the movement of the whole army arrested. "Men and horses," says Marbot, "were hurled over precipices; the leading battalions had actually begun to retreat."

But neither the deep snow nor the wild hills, nor the yet wilder tempest, could stay Napoleon's vehement purpose. He made his cavalry dismount, and the leading files to interlock their arms and press on in spite of snow and ice and blackness. Napoleon himself, with Lannes holding his arm on one side, and Duroc on the other, trudged with the leading files. The crest of the range was reached and crossed, though many men and animals died. On the 26th Napoleon had reached Tordesillas with the Guard and two divisions, having covered 100 miles in that tremendous march, and he wrote to Soult, "If the English pass to-day in their position they are lost." Still pushing furiously onward, he reached Valderas; but he was too late by exactly twelve hours! The English were across the Esla! So daringly had Moore held on to his position, so exactly had he calculated the speed and reach of Napoleon's stroke!

Moore had pressed on resolutely to attack Soult. He was slightly superior to the French in numbers, and believed he could shatter Soult's force and begin his retreat to the coast with the glory of having destroyed one of Napoleon's marshals almost in Napoleon's very presence. He proposed to make

a night-march to Carran, and there fall on Soult. At nine o'clock on the night of December 23 his troops were formed in two columns ready for the adventure. The track lay across a wide plain, thick with snow; a bitter tempest was blowing, yet the men were in the highest spirits. A great battle lay before them; and battle for the British soldier is a tonic. The right column had already fallen into quick step, when a dragoon came riding furiously up. He brought the news that Napoleon was in full march to cut off the British army. Moore arrested his impatient columns, and at dawn his divisions began to fall back.

Moore was now the pursued, not the pursuer. Soult was pressing eagerly on his rear, Napoleon thundering on his flank. On the 26th the Esla was crossed. It was a wild scene. Rain fell incessantly from the black skies; the river was rising; there was but a single clumsy boat, and an army had to cross, with all its baggage and followers. A ford was found, and infantry and artillery fought their way through the fast rising waters. Moore himself crossed by a bridge at another point, and before the long column was well over, the French cavalry were upon the hill and looking down on the scene.

The distance from Sahagun, the point at which Moore's retreat began, and Corunna, where he expected the British transports to be waiting for him, was, in a direct line, about 160 miles; the actual march



of the troops was probably about 220 miles. The retreat began on December 25. Corunna was reached on January 12. Measured thus by either distance or time, the retreat does not seem a very formidable thing. Napoleon, with 50,000 men, marched from Madrid to Villapando, 164 miles, in seven days. Moore in eight days of actual marching only covered 150 miles.

When translated into the cold terms of an itinerary, the story, indeed, is soon told. On the 26th the Esla was crossed. On the 27th Benevente was reached, and the columns halted for two days. On the 30th the headquarters were at Astorga, and a junction was effected with Baird, the combined forces at this point numbering 25,000 men. Moore had announced he would stand and fight at this point, but Soult, pressing on the British rear, was now superior in numbers to Moore, and the British general feared he might slip past his left flank and cut him off from Corunna. Junot, with the very troops which had fought at Vimiero, was moving on his right shoulder from Burgos. Lefebvre was striking at his communications from Salamanca, and betwixt Junot and Lefebvre, Napoleon was coming up like a tempest. Moore, in a word, was within a crescent-like curve of hostile armies, more than five times as numerous as his own, and all moving upon him by lines which resembled the radii of a circle converging to its centre.

On December 30 he fell back from Astorga. On January 1 Napoleon reached that place, and 80,000 French troops with 200 guns were concentrated there. It is a proof of Napoleon's energy that within ten days of learning Moore's strategy, and in the depth of winter, he had carried so great an army across 200 miles of mountainous country and in the wildest weather. But it is also a dramatic justification of Moore's strategy that he had drawn a hostile force so formidable into a hilly corner of Spain, thus staying its southward rush. The French columns which crowded Astorga would have been marching on Lisbon but for the English general's skilful and audacious strategy. It is a proof, again, of the perfection of Napoleon's military art, that he and Soult, marching through wild country and wild weather, and from widely separated points, the one traversing over a hundred, the other over two hundred miles of difficult roads, yet had effected their junction at the agreed point and the agreed moment with something like mathematical exactness.

At Astorga Napoleon surrendered the pursuit of the English to Soult. The adroit Englishman had evaded him, and the whole concentration of Napoleon's columns, planned with such skill and urged with such fire, had failed! Napoleon relieved his feelings privately by much angry rhetoric. Thus on December 31 he writes to Joseph: "My vanguard is near Astorga; the English are running away as fast as they

can. . . . They are abhorred by everybody ; they have carried off everything, and then maltreated and beaten the inhabitants. There could not have been a better sedative for Spain than to send here an English army." The same day he writes to Josephine : "I have been for several days pursuing the English, but they fly in terror." Again, on January 1, 1809, he wrote to Fouché : "The English have abandoned the Spaniards in a shameful and cowardly manner. We are pursuing them hotly. . . . The English, it appears, have sent for 10,000 horses, so as to escape more quickly. Have all this shown up in the newspapers. Have caricatures made, and songs and popular ditties written. Have them translated into German and Italian, and circulated in Italy and Germany." Napoleon was determined to celebrate, at least, a literary triumph over his enemies !

Moore now divided his army ; his light companies under Craufurd took the road to Vigo, while he himself fell back to Villefranca. On January 6 he reached Lugo and turned to face Soult. The Frenchman, however, shrank from closing with his enemy till Victor, who was coming up with 20,000 men, should join him. On the 8th Moore made a night march to Valmeda. On the 10th the columns reached Betanzos. On the 12th the British looked down from the summits of the hill near Corunna, only to find the bay empty.

During this retreat of eighteen days it will be seen



that Moore's forces actually halted four days, and it seems difficult to understand how a British army, unshaken by defeat and splendidly led, should practically have fallen into ruin in a period of time so short. But the march from Sahagun to Corunna was, for suffering and horror, like a tiny section of the Moscow retreat. The track lay through the savage Asturian hills. It was winter-time. Tempests raged almost incessantly. Every stream was swollen, every ravine was choked with snow. The troops were without shelter; and it may be frankly admitted that British troops do not shine in the virtues required in a retreat. The men grow sullen and reckless. Discipline vanishes. The British private would rather stand in his tracks and die facing the enemy than tramp, perhaps with bleeding feet and hungry stomach, to escape him.

At Valderas and Benevente the troops discovered great vaults stored with wine, and wild scenes of drunkenness took place, and still more fatally affected discipline. At Astorga the British columns found the town occupied by the wreck of Romana's army—a mass of worn-out wretches, half-naked and more than half-starved, fermenting with disease of every kind; and this helped to shake still further the morale of the British troops themselves.

But the toil of the marches, along roads knee-deep in mud, or through wild passes choked with snow, the incessant rain, the bitter cold, the exhaustion of



hunger, taxed human strength and endurance to the breaking-point. The marches were sometimes pushed with unwise energy. More than once no halt was made during the short, bitter, winter day, and the long black winter night that followed, and scores of men fell dead in the staggering ranks, killed by pure fatigue. The country in some places was most difficult, and an officer who shared the horrors of the retreat has described the extraordinary sight witnessed in one wild and gloomy valley which had to be passed. "Thousands of the red-coats," he says, "were creeping like snails up the ascent before us, their muskets slung round their necks, and clambering, with both hands, as they hauled themselves up." "I looked round when we had hardly gained the highest point of those slippery precipices, and saw the rear of the army winding along the narrow road. I saw their way marked by the wretched people who lay on all sides, dying from fatigue and cold. Their bodies reddened in spots the white surface of the ground." Now and again a tableland had to be crossed, over which the tempest raved with unchecked fury, and the toiling columns were almost buried in snow; their track was strewn with the dead and the dying. "The long day," says the writer we have already quoted, "found us still pushing on; the night caused us no halt."

Little groups of soldiers—often with women and children amongst them—sat huddled together in the

snow with bent heads, waiting for death. The troops that limped into Corunna were gaunt, bent, ragged, many literally blind with fatigue and hardship. Napier, afterwards the historian of the Peninsular War, shared in the sufferings and heroism of this retreat. "I marched," he says, "for several days with bare feet. The days and nights were filled with scuffling tempests of sleet and snow." Napier had only a jacket and a pair of linen trousers for clothes. "My feet," he says, "were swelled, and bled at every step in such a manner that General Craufurd, who saw me in that state, turned his head away."

Yet the blackness of this retreat was lit up with gleams of splendid heroism. The rear-guard, under the tonic of perpetual battle, maintained their discipline unbroken. They passed whole nights under arms in snow and rain. Twice they made forced marches of forty miles across savage country and muddy roads. Seven times they closed in desperate conflict with the pursuers. Yet they lost fewer men than any other part of the army!

Courage, indeed, was a quality which never failed even the stragglers. More than once, when the French cavalry were amongst them, they turned upon them under some leader chosen at the moment, fell into rough order, and drove off the French horsemen with slaughter. A British army in the worst horrors of retreat, when every military virtue seems to have perished, instantly feels the summons to

battle as an inspiration. The stragglers, somehow, crystallise into regiments. The sick forget their pains. Discipline asserts its ancient magic, and what, an hour before, seemed a procession of limping and ragged fugitives, becomes suddenly a formidable and by no means uncheerful army. At Lugo, Moore turned at bay, and the process instantly brought the stragglers back to the ranks and restored authority to the officers. The men forgot hunger, cold, and sickness, and became jesting and hardy soldiers again. Soult refused to fight, and when the retreat began once more, with new hardships, the sullen troops fell afresh into disorder.

The part taken by the cavalry under Paget in this retreat was very gallant. They faced with cheerful courage and tireless hardihood the vastly superior French cavalry which pressed on the British rear, and never failed to overthrow them in the actual shock of the charge. Some of the cavalry exploits on the British side were singularly brilliant. Thus, on December 26, Paget turned on the French horsemen near Mayorga. The French cavalry made their appearance on the summit of a steep hill, and seemed about to ride down on the British stragglers beneath. Paget sent two squadrons of the 10th Hussars at them. The slope of the hill was sodden with rain, and in places thick with snow. Colonel Leigh, of the 10th, rode boldly with his first squadron up the face of the hill, and men and horses were blown



when they reached the crest. With great coolness Leigh halted his men to give them breath, dressed his line—all under sharp fire—and then rode straight in on the French, who were foolish enough to receive the charge while halted. These two squadrons of Hussars actually killed and captured of the French a number exceeding their own entire force.

Again, on the 29th, at Castro Gonsalo, some 600 French cavalry of the Guard pushed across the river on the British pickets. Colonel Otway, who commanded the rearmost posts, drew his pickets together, numbering at first only sixty men, and coolly faced the French. As other pickets fell in, and Otway's force grew, he suddenly rode at the leading French squadron, overthrew it, slaying its captain, and then fell back before the main body of the French could reach him. The plain was covered with stragglers, baggage-mules, &c., and if the French cavalry could have broken through that thin screen of British horse, they would have wrought enormous mischief. Paget had placed the 10th Hussars under cover of some houses, and when the French had advanced into the plain, these rode out at a gallop, charged and broke the enemy, drove them back to the river, riding furiously in their tumbled ranks, and slaying almost at will. Their commander, General Lefebvre-Desnouettes, was captured. "At this moment," says Marbot, "the Emperor came up. Imagine his wrath at hearing that not only had his favourite regiment



undergone a repulse, but that its commander remained in the hands of the English." Marbot adds that the English refused to exchange the captured general, as they wished to exhibit in London as a captive "one of the commanders of the Imperial Guard of France."

Moore lost 4000 men in the marches and hardships of those eighteen days. It is an expressive proof of the severities endured, that when the Royals reached Batanzos they only mustered with the colours nine officers, three sergeants, and three privates. The rest had dropped on the road. But it is a sufficient demonstration that whatever were Moore's losses in this disastrous retreat his men never lost their fighting quality, that when the much-enduring columns marched over 14,000 strong into Corunna, they had not lost a gun or a flag to the enemy.

Paget, perhaps, is the most gallant figure in the black landscape of the retreat to Corunna; but Craufurd, though a sterner, is quite as heroic a figure in the march made by the light troops to Vigo. The Rifles furnished the rear-guard of this body, and these valiant, hardy, but self-willed veterans found in Craufurd a leader of fiercer temper than even their own, and his stern will held them together with iron severity and vigour. Craufurd knew that the safety of the column depended upon its discipline, and he enforced it with ruthless energy, shooting or hanging defaulters under the very muskets of the

attacking French. Nothing tired him. Nothing daunted him. The feeling betwixt the Rifles and Craufurd was, on both sides, an odd compound of dread, anger, and affection. "The Rifles," says one who tells the story from the ranks, "being always at his heels, he seemed to think them his familiars. If he stopped his horse, and halted to deliver one of his stern reprimands, you would see half-a-dozen lean, unshaven, shoeless, and savage riflemen, standing for the moment leaning upon their weapons, and scowling up in his face as he scolded; and when he dashed the spurs into his reeking horse, they would throw up their rifles upon their shoulders and hobble after him again."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FIGHT AT CORUNNA

A PAUSE of three days occurred after Moore's footsore soldiers limped into Corunna. The British transports had not made their appearance, and had to be summoned from Vigo. Soult's troops were almost as much exhausted as the British, and it was not until the 14th that there were any signs of the French onfall. Moore filled up the interval with some grim preparations for embarkation. More than 4000 barrels of gunpowder were stored in the magazine outside Corunna, and on the 13th this huge mass of explosives was blown up. The earth shook under the blast of the explosion, a wave of sound rolled with the majesty of thunder up the trembling hills and far over the quivering sea. The waves ran back from the beach. Into the blue sky shot a gigantic column of smoke, a black and mighty pillar that seemed to run beyond human vision into the azure depths. Then this aerial column wavered and broke; and back to earth rushed a tempest of stones and fragments of iron and wood, killing many persons.

Next all the foundered cavalry and artillery horses were shot. No less than 290 horses of the German Legion alone were in this way destroyed; and of the horses of the 15th Hussars, 400 strong when they entered Spain, only fifteen were left. Betwixt a cavalryman and his horse the tie becomes very close, and the German dragoons and the English hussars expressed their feelings about the slaughter of their horses in characteristic fashion—the hussars by loud and energetic swearing, the German dragoons by not a little sentimental weeping.

On the 14th the transports reached the bay, and Moore at once embarked his baggage, his sick, and his artillery. On the 16th, as the French still seemed reluctant to attack, Moore determined to ship his whole force. At noon he mounted his horse and rode off to visit his outposts, having given orders that the embarkation was to begin at four. At this moment the French columns were seen moving on the slopes of the hills looking down on Corunna. They were about to attack. As Moore gazed steadfastly at the huge columns coming into sight, his face lit up. The tragedy of the retreat was not to close without the stern rapture of battle and of victory.

Soult had 20,000 troops and a strong artillery; Moore had only 14,500 men, with nine light pieces—six-pounders. The French occupied a range of steep and rocky hills stretching in a curve from the Mero to the St. Jago road. This range constitutes the true



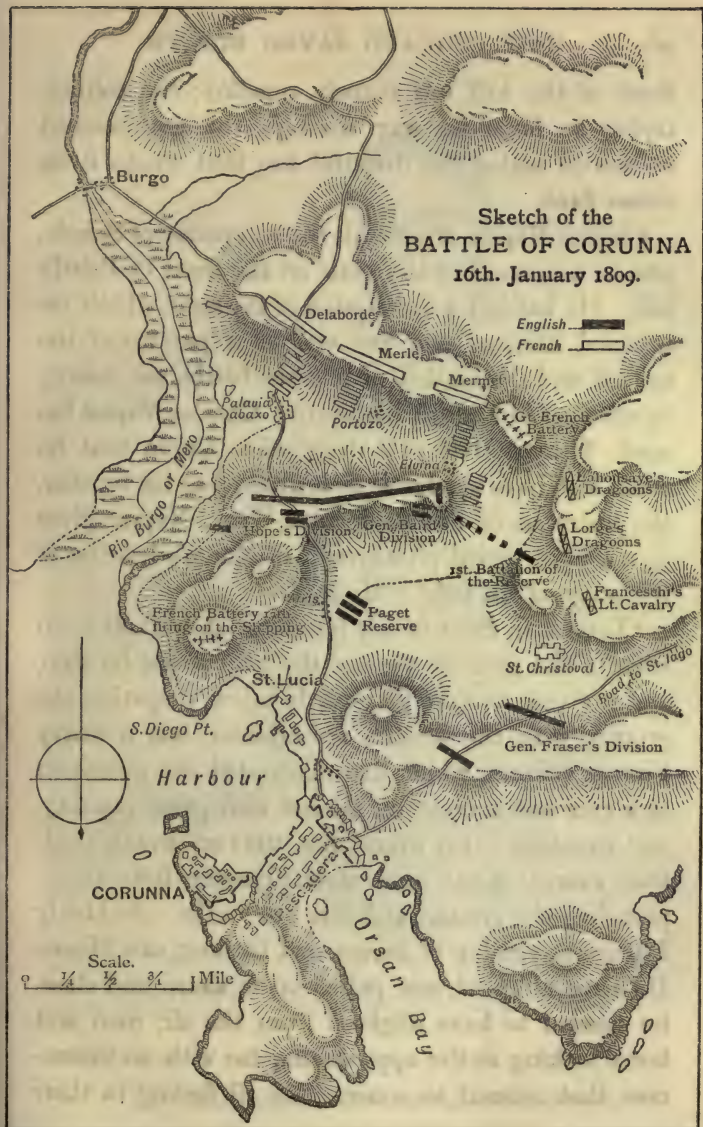
defence of Corunna, but Moore had not troops enough to hold it. He fell back upon a lower and shorter range of hills nearer the town. The two ranges are not strictly parallel; they resemble, indeed, the two sides of a triangle, with the river Mero as a base. The inner side of the triangle, held by the British, does not actually meet the range on which the French stood. A valley running clear down to Corunna broke the British line near the vertex of the triangle. Beyond the valley rises an isolated hill, a prolongation of the hilly ridge held by the British. Immediately opposite the gap in the British front the hill held by the French rises to a rocky crest, and to the summit of this Soult had dragged eleven heavy guns. With these he could scourge the valley, rake the whole front of the British line, which approached the French obliquely, and could sweep the shoulder of the British position, only 1200 yards distant, which looked down on the valley.

This rocky crest with its heavy battery, held by Mermet's division, formed Soult's left; his centre was occupied by Merle's division, his right by Delaborde's. On the British side, Hope's division formed the left and centre; Baird's division, holding the hill under the stroke of Soult's great battery, constituted Moore's right. The isolated hill beyond the valley was held by the 28th and 91st, while a thin chain of rifle pickets stretched across the little valley betwixt the hill and Baird. Betwixt Soult's great battery

and Baird's hill was the village of Elvina, held as an outpost by the pickets of the 50th.

The British line, looked at from Soult's position, was pierced by what seemed a fatal gap—the valley betwixt Baird and the isolated hill held by the two regiments named. Soult attacked simultaneously along the whole British front, but the strength of his onfall was really flung on Baird. The great battery on the rocky crest we have described scourged Baird's hill with a tempest of shot. Then a heavy column of infantry came at the double down the slope of the French position, its officers, with brandished swords, leading, the men sending up a tumult of shouts, "Tuez! tuez!" ("Kill! kill!"). The British pickets were thrust in an instant out of Elvina. The French column, as it came on, broke into two. One column attacked the English hill boldly in front, the second brushed aside the rifle pickets which formed a screen across the valley, and tried to turn the shoulder of the hill, so as to take Baird's position in reverse.

The apparent gap in the English line, however, was in reality a death-trap for the French. The column that broke into it found itself scourged with a deadly musketry fire on both flanks. From the isolated hill, the 28th and 91st, reinforced by Paget's division, poured incessant volleys; from the 42nd on Baird's hill, drawn up at right angles to the British front, a fire as close and deadly rolled. The attack on the





front of the hill was fiercely repelled; the column trying to force its way through the gap seemed to shrivel under the dreadful fire that smote it on either flank.

Charles Napier, afterwards the conqueror of Scinde, was in command of the 50th on the front of Baird's hill. He has left a description of the fight, which, for mingled humour and fire, and as a picture of the tumult and distraction of a great battle, can hardly be excelled in English literature. Charles Napier has made history; but this description shows that he could also have written it as brilliantly as his brother, the historian of the Peninsular War. Napier gives us a sort of verbal photograph of Moore's bearing at this stage of the fight. He says:—

“I stood in front of my left wing on a knoll from whence the greatest part of the field could be seen, and my pickets were fifty yards below, disputing the ground with the French skirmishers, but a heavy French column, which had descended the mountain at a run, was coming on behind with great rapidity, and shouting—‘*En avant, tue, tue! en avant, tue!*’ their cannon at the same time, plunging from above, ploughed the ground and tore our ranks. Suddenly I heard the gallop of horses, and turning, saw Moore. He came at speed, and pulled up so sharp and close, he seemed to have alighted from the air, man and horse looking at the approaching foe with an intentness that seemed to concentrate all feeling in their





SIR CHARLES NAPIER

*From a lithograph after a drawing by SMART*



eyes. The sudden stop of the animal—a cream-coloured one with black tail and mane—had cast the latter streaming forwards, its ears were pushed out like horns, while its eyes flashed fire, and it snorted loudly with expanded nostrils. My first thought was, ‘It will be away like the wind;’ but then I looked at the rider, and the horse was forgotten! Thrown on its haunches, the animal came sliding and dashing the dirt up with its forefeet, thus bending the General forward almost to its neck; but his head was thrown back, and his look more keenly piercing than I ever before saw it. He glanced to the right and left, and then fixed his eyes intently on the enemy’s advancing column, at the same time grasping the reins with both his hands, and pressing the horse firmly with his knees; his body thus seemed to deal with the animal, while his mind was intent on the enemy, and his aspect was one of searching intenseness beyond the power of words to describe. For a while he looked, and then galloped to the left without uttering a word!”

As a companion picture to Moore, Napier describes the general in command of his own division—Lord William Bentinck—ambling up on a quiet mule through the heavy fire and chatting with Napier, mule and general seeming equally indifferent to the flying bullets and the falling men. Bentinck, adds Napier, began discoursing on things in general “with more than his usual good-humour and placidity.”

"I remember saying to myself," writes Napier, "this chap takes it coolly, or the devil's in it!"

When Bentinck and his mule ambled off, Napier, whose temper was of the fieriest, took the 50th forward, drove the French out of Elvina, fought his way up to the base of the crag from which Soult's great battery was thundering, and with some thirty privates attempted to storm it. Bentinck, however, had ordered back the main body of the regiment, Napier's little group was destroyed, and he himself taken prisoner by the French.

Meanwhile Hope had roughly flung back the columns attacking the British left and centre; the columns which had assailed Baird's hill were recoiling in confusion, and Moore saw that the moment had come for a counter-stroke. He was bringing up Paget's division to storm the great battery, and so thrust back Soult's left and tumble his line in ruins into the Mero. But at that moment Moore himself was struck down. A cannon-shot smote him on the left shoulder, carrying away part of the collar-bone and leaving the arm hanging by the flesh. Moore was hurled from his horse by the stroke, but his eager spirit was fixed on the conflict raging in front of him, where the Black Watch was at that moment driving back the French column. The stricken general raised himself up on his right elbow, not a line in his face altering, and eagerly watched the struggle. Some soldiers of the 42nd ran up to carry Moore to the



rear. Hardinge, his aide-de-camp, proceeded to unbuckle his sword, but that seemed to touch the dying man's honour. "I had rather it should go out of the field with me," he said. Hardinge, noting Moore's absorption in the battle and indifference to his own wound, expressed a hope that he would recover. Moore turned his head round for a moment, looked composedly at the dreadful wound, and said, "No, Hardinge; I feel that to be impossible."

As the soldiers carried him off the field he repeatedly made them halt and turn, that he might watch the fight. A much-attached servant met the little group and broke into tears. "My friend," said Moore to him with a smile, "this is nothing!" The scene in the room where Moore died was almost as pathetic as that in the cockpit of the *Victory* when Nelson met his fate. The dying soldier said to Colonel Anderson, "You know, Anderson, I have always wished to die this way." "I hope," he said again and again, "the people of England will be satisfied; I hope my country will do me justice." Then he would ask, "Are the French beaten?" Moore's thoughts turned presently to the youthful soldier who had commanded the reserve, and had shown a resolution, a coolness, and a mastery over his soldiers which no veteran could have surpassed. "Is Paget in the room?" he asked. He was told "No." "Remember me to him," he whispered; then with emphasis, "Remember me to him. He

is a fine fellow!" Only once his voice broke, when giving a last message for his mother. "I feel myself so strong," he said again, "I fear I shall be long dying." But he was not. Death came with merciful swiftness. As night fell, while the thunder of the battle grew ever fainter in the distance, Moore's gallant spirit passed away.

Moore's death arrested and made imperfect the victory the British had won. Baird, his second in command, had been severely wounded, and Hope assumed direction of affairs. If the British reserves had been thrown frankly into the fight, it can hardly be doubted that Soult would have been—not merely defeated, but destroyed. But Hope held that enough had been done for glory. He forbore to press the retiring French columns, marched his own regiments under cover of night to the shore, and embarked them swiftly and without confusion, Hill's brigade holding Corunna to cover the embarkation. When morning came Soult discovered that the British army had vanished, and he advanced slowly over the scene of the battle of the previous day. Some of the French guns opened fire on the transports, but a British seventy-four thundered angrily back in reply, the fire ceased, and, with bellying sails, the transports drew off from the coast of Spain, with the wreck of Moore's gallant but ill-fated force.

Baird had been wounded by a grape-shot which struck him high on his left arm and shattered the

bone. He walked with unchanged brow into Corunna, and, when the surgeons decided that the arm must be removed out of the socket, he sat, leaning his right arm on a table, without a sigh or groan while, with the rough surgery of the period, that dreadful operation was performed! It must be admitted that the standard of hardihood in the soldiers of that age was high.

The story of Moore's burial has been made immortal in Wolfe's noble lines, but severe historical accuracy is not usually characteristic of poetry. It is not true that "no useless coffin enclosed his breast." He was not buried "darkly, at dead of night." A grave was dug for the dead soldier on the ramparts by some men of the 9th Regiment; his body was wrapped in a military cloak and blanket, and laid in a rough coffin, and at eight o'clock in the morning, just as the transports were drawing off the shore, Moore was buried. Still his lonely tomb stands on the ramparts of Corunna. Southward are the wild and lofty hills across which, with so much suffering, he had brought his army. Nearer is the low range where he turned at bay and overthrew his pursuers. Above his grave stands a monument, reared by the hands of Frenchmen, bearing the brief and soldierly inscription, "John Moore, leader of the English armies, slain in battle, 1809."

Moore, some one has said, is known only because "a poet of a single song sang him an immortal



dirge;" but this is an absurd estimate. If Wolfe had never written his famous lines, Moore, by force of character and the scale of his achievements, would have lived long in English memory. He had, perhaps, every quality of a great soldier save one. He lacked hopefulness. His courage was, it is true, serenely heroic. In personal character he had a touch of Tennyson's Sir Galahad. He was noble-minded, with a haughty scorn of falsehood and of meanness, and a devotion to duty which knew neither limit nor flaw. He had a curious faculty for touching the better nature of those about him. No man could be base or selfish while under his influence. His standard in soldiership was singularly high, and his mastery of the science of war has not often been surpassed in British military records. But he was over-anxious. He lacked the iron steadfastness which is unmoved by the shock of disaster. His very sense of responsibility sometimes shadowed his clear intellect. He seemed to fail in the sense of perspective;—smaller difficulties that were near, that is, sometimes hid from him great advantages which were distant. Yet amongst the gallant soldiers who have fought and died for the honour of England, there is no loftier and more lovable figure than that of Sir John Moore.





SIR JOHN MOORE

*From an engraving after a drawing by A. J. OLIVER, A.R.A.*



## CHAPTER IX

### THE WALCHEREN EXPEDITION

THE Walcheren expedition can hardly be described as a chapter in the history of the Peninsular War. Taken geographically, it has no relation to the Peninsula. But the expedition is a sordid and melancholy parenthesis in that history. It represents the supreme military effort put forth by England in 1809, and some brief account may be fittingly given of it at this stage.

It is the story of a failure; perhaps of the greatest failure on the English side in the long struggle with Napoleon. The Walcheren expedition itself had a wise inspiration. It was planned on a magnificent scale. But it was carried out with so much of loitering delay and of drivelling imbecility that it constitutes one of the monumental scandals of British administration. The British mind contrives to retain its self-respect by the process of diligently forgetting most of the uncomfortable facts in British history. So the story of the Walcheren expedition has grown faint, as though its characters had been written in some magical ink, which, at charity's whisper, faded

and became invisible. Yet, as an example of how a great expedition, which had every military virtue except that of competent leadership, may become the very jest of history, and as an illustration of the special vice, both of the British temperament and of the British political system, the story of the Walcheren expedition deserves to be preserved.

The Scheldt is, in a sense, the rival of the Thames. It is the great commercial artery of the Low Countries, as the Thames is of Southern England; and Antwerp, the key of the noble estuary of the Scheldt, is by situation fitted to be not only the rival of London, but the base of any great hostile expedition against the shores of England. Parma in 1588 gathered at Antwerp part of the great army which the Invincible Armada was to convoy to England, and which was to make Great Britain a Spanish province. The opening of the Scheldt by the French Directory in 1793 was the signal for the outbreak of the Twenty Years' War itself. And in 1809 Napoleon was reconstructing at Antwerp that vast plan of attack on England which Nelson had, for the moment, wrecked at Trafalgar. He constructed huge docks there capable of containing forty ships of the line. It was to be made an impregnable naval base, where new fleets, mightier than those which perished under Brueys and Villeneuve, might be equipped against Great Britain.

At St. Helena Napoleon loved to dwell on these



phantom fleets, which were to sail out of the Scheldt to overthrow the maritime power of England, and on the great fortified city, with its miles of docks, which was to be their base. And, as a matter of fact, these new fleets were beginning to take form. No less than thirty-five ships of the line were already built or in course of construction. It seemed probable that a powerful armament of fifty ships of the line would soon be in existence. "Antwerp," Napoleon said, "was to me a province in itself. It is one of the chief causes of my exile to St. Helena. If they had left Antwerp to me, I would have concluded peace at Chatillon. France without Antwerp and the Rhine frontier is nothing."

English statesmen were not likely to overlook the menace to England which Antwerp offered. Pitt himself in 1797 planned an expedition to the Scheldt, though, somehow, it was never executed. Castlereagh, who, with all his limitations as a statesman, had a clear vision of the vital point in the struggle betwixt Napoleon and England, conceived the plan of crushing this new seat of French naval power when he assumed office in 1807. In November 1808, Austria, humbled, plundered, and desperate, had resolved to try her fortunes once more in battle with Napoleon. The European rising of 1809 was about to break out. Austria communicated her plans to the British Cabinet, and it was agreed that there should be an English expedition against Antwerp. This would

serve a double office. It would be a powerful distraction in favour of Austria, and it would destroy the new fleet which threatened to become a menace to Great Britain.

As a mere effort in strategy, the Walcheren expedition had every possible merit. The French armies were scattered over half Europe. There were 300,000 in Spain, another 300,000 in Germany, 100,000 in Italy; and, at this moment, when Napoleon was waging an equal and desperate combat on the Rhine against Austria and in Spain against Wellington, 40,000 British troops were to land at the mouth of the Scheldt. Antwerp at that moment was almost defenceless; its batteries were unarmed, its garrison consisted of some 2000 invalids and coastguards, with such gendarmes and customs officers as could be hastily swept in from the district about it. The chance of destroying the city seemed easy and certain, and the British Cabinet planned its expedition on an imperial scale, a scale worthy of the Power which was the Mistress of the Sea.

A fleet mightier than that which triumphed at Trafalgar was to convoy to the swampy islets at the mouth of the Scheldt a British army stronger than that which won the crowning victory at Waterloo. The fleet, under Sir Richard Strachan, numbered more than a hundred ships of war. The military force consisted of 40,000 men of all arms, with two great battering trains; its divisional leaders — Graham,

Hope, Paget, Beresford, Eyre Coote—were experienced and gallant soldiers. It was carried to the scene of operations by more than 400 transports. England, in a word, never before or since despatched from her shores a more powerful and gallant expedition.

The spectacle when the fleet at last got under weigh, on July 28, 1809, was such as the sea has not often witnessed. The fleet, with its black hulls, its belly-ing sails, its forest of masts, seemed to hide the very sea. "The whole space from the North to the South Foreland," wrote an officer who looked back on the spectacle from one of the leading ships, "was one continued spread of canvas that concealed the sea and all the lower part of the land, and amongst this mass nothing appeared in any defined shape except the flashing of the guns." And this mighty expedition, it must be remembered, was striking at a point only a hundred miles distant from the shores of England. With a commander like Wellington, or Moore, or Abercromby, that expedition might well have antedated Waterloo by six years. Despatched at the right moment, landed at the right point, and led with energy and skill, the troops which perished at Walcheren might have marched on Paris itself. They certainly would have brought Napoleon back from the Rhine in alarmed haste, and saved the surrender of Vienna, the slaughter of Aspern, and the mighty overthrow of Wagram.



As a melancholy fact, this stupendous expedition, which whitened the sea with its sails as it put out from the Downs on July 28, had abandoned its task and was a confessed failure within six weeks of its start, and by the end of September its scanty and fever-poisoned survivors were creeping back to England, leaving the mud-flats at the mouth of the Scheldt sown with British graves.

The expedition, for one thing, was pre-doomed to failure by the imbecile delays which ran, or rather loitered, through all its stages. It had been proposed two years earlier; the honour of England was pledged to it in November 1808. It was undertaken to influence the fighting on the Rhine. But the mere almanac constitutes an unanswerable indictment of British administration. The expedition, it will be seen, sailed on July 28, and at that time the fighting on the Rhine was ended and the fate of Austria sealed. The British fleet, as though by a stroke of ironic humour, sailed from the Downs on the day after the news of the armistice of Zmarm reached England. The British regiments intended to take part in the expedition were practising the goose-step in their barracks when Napoleon was driving the Austrians across the Danube, or entering Vienna in triumph; and the goose-step was still being practised when the Archduke Charles so nearly overthrew Napoleon in the stupendous fight at Aspern. "We were killing cockchafers in the Deal barrack-yard,"



wrote an officer who took part in the Walcheren expedition, "when Napoleon was overthrowing the Austrians at Wagram." When the campaign was ended, Austria destroyed, and the terms of peace practically settled, then the British expedition, intended to influence these events, at last hoisted its leisurely anchors in the Downs. It was about to heroically step on to the arena when all the other combatants had left it!

It needs something more than "the invincible loitering habit," to which, in public affairs at least, the British temper so easily lends itself, to explain this delay; and the explanation is clear. British public opinion at that moment was occupied with a big military scandal. It was exploring the performances of the remarkable Duke of York, who was commander-in-chief, and who had transferred many of his official duties to his still more remarkable mistress, Mrs. Clarke, and, as a consequence, had to surrender his great post. A British community, grasping its nose and occupied in exploring a scandal so malodorous, and in dismissing its own commander-in-chief, had no energy to expend in pushing forward a great military and naval expedition. This was left to the politicians. And the politicians at that moment, as it happened, were absorbed in a scandal, or rather a plot of their own—the famous plot for the dismissal of Castlereagh! Canning, with a large section of the Cabinet, was busy with

a conspiracy against the unfortunate Minister at War, and at the very moment when Castlereagh was carrying on one campaign in Spain and planning another on the Scheldt, his dismissal had been demanded from the king and conceded by him; and all this in profound secrecy! Castlereagh himself was thus, in a political sense, officially sentenced to be hanged by his own colleagues, and knew nothing, as yet, of the circumstance! The plot in the Cabinet, and the public scandal which drove the British commander-in-chief from his office, left the Walcheren expedition drifting like a derelict ship on stagnant waters where no tide stirred and no wind blew.

To this belated expedition was given a commander who was gifted, in a quite overwhelming degree, with all the evil qualities necessary to ensure defeat. Lord Chatham was the son of the greatest War Minister and the brother of the greatest statesman England has ever known; and it is an odd proof of the partiality with which Nature distributes—or withholds—her gifts, that the son of such a father, and the brother of such a statesman, should have possessed the most addleheaded head that ever wore a cocked hat. Without his cocked hat—in a purely civilian capacity, that is—Lord Chatham is understood to have had some gleams of common-sense. He had his merits in the Cabinet. But he was, without being a coward or a traitor, perhaps the

worst commander that ever led an expedition. The British army has too often been described with justice as "an army of lions led by an ass." Chatham had many asinine qualities, but the most conspicuous of these was his capacity for dawdling on a quite stupendous scale. Popular opinion described him as "the laziest man in the British army." He certainly had a fine natural genius for loitering, and had spent a long life in cultivating that gift. He was capable of being in earnest, the wits said, on only two subjects—his own health, and the flavour of his turtle-soup.

Once in those sad days, when the British army was perishing at Walcheren, the troops were roused to excitement by the spectacle of Lord Chatham visible on horseback a little after eleven o'clock in the morning. That the general made his appearance at so early an hour showed great events were about to happen. Having ridden to the east end of the island, however, and stared solemnly at the distant spire of Antwerp Cathedral, his lordship turned back to his turtle-soup, satisfied he had fulfilled the whole duty of a British soldier. Lord Chatham lives in British recollection principally by means of the well-known stanza into which the performances of the Walcheren expedition are condensed:—

"The Earl of Chatham, with his sword half-drawn,  
Stood waiting for Sir Richard Strachan.  
Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,  
Stood waiting for the Earl of Chatham."



These lines, however, are unfair to Sir Richard Strachan. He was a gallant and energetic sailor, and, under him, the fleet did its part with skill and vigour. It was quite capable, indeed, of capturing Antwerp on its own account, if it had not been encumbered with Lord Chatham and his 40,000 soldiers. Lord Chatham supplied all the laziness of the business. He had enough of that quality, indeed, to have equipped a community of lotos-eaters. Laziness naturally breeds other intellectual vices, the chief amongst which is ignorance; and, as the inquiry held after the failure of the expedition proved, Lord Chatham set out to besiege Antwerp, so to speak, with his hands in his pockets, and without taking the trouble to ascertain whether Antwerp was fortified or not. George III. specially chose Lord Chatham to command this great expedition, a circumstance which illustrates that red-faced monarch's faculty for estimating men.

Side by side with the yawning figure of Lord Chatham, as one of the controlling spirits of the Walcheren expedition, is Sir Home Popham, a restless genius, who had almost every other gift but that of common-sense. Probably no man in that generation got himself talked about so much, and did so little, as Sir Home Popham. The Walcheren expedition, in a word, was an enterprise commanded by a drone, who was advised by a charlatan.

The British War Office—wisely uncertain of its own



wisdom—solemnly took a plebiscite of all its generals as to the practicability of the enterprise, and being thus fortified by what may be called a majority vote of military experts, the expedition at last set sail. But every possible blunder marked its history from the very outset. English newspapers, after their manner, published all its details, so that its purpose and strength were as well known in Paris as at the British Horse Guards. The army was to land in what was well known to be a mere fever-bed; yet no doctors were consulted, no sanitary precautions taken, no proper medicines sent. Amongst the 600 vessels which constituted the expedition, there was only one belated and unrecognised hospital-ship. Regiments at Deal were marched to Ramsgate to be embarked, while regiments at Ramsgate had to plod to Deal for the same purpose. The shortest route to Antwerp is that by Blankenburg. From that port a paved road led straight to Antwerp, and the British army might have reached its destination within three days. Instead, Walcheren and North and South Beveland—the cluster of islands which plug, so to speak, the estuary of the Scheldt—were chosen; and on the evening of the 29th and the morning of the 30th, the sea off these islands was white with the sails of the great British fleet.

Chatham's instructions were explicit. His business was to capture Antwerp with the least possible delay, to destroy its docks and seize the fleet lying there.

Everything else was secondary to this purpose. He might occupy or blockade Flushing on the southern edge of Walcheren island, but at the same moment he must push on to Antwerp. The expedition, he was told, must be considered "*merely as a coup de main*" directed at Antwerp. But a *coup de main* to be struck by a loitering drone, with hands in pocket, was an absurdity. It was certain to be delivered at the wrong point, or delivered too late and too feebly; and this is exactly what happened. Lord Chatham seemed to lack energy enough to read his orders, or intelligence to comprehend them.

He nearly succeeded, it is true, in spite of himself. One division of the army, under Lord Huntly, was to land at Cadsand, on the southern shore of the estuary of the Scheldt. Had the landing been effected, the troops could have turned all the batteries on the southern bank of the Scheldt and marched straight on Antwerp. Grave and owl-eyed history records that the commander of his division saw—or imagined he saw—through the haze, "a considerable force on the beach, and did not venture to hazard a landing." Now Huntly had 7000 men in his transports, and a British general in command of such a force, who did not "venture to hazard a landing" because he saw through a fog some hostile troops, only a fourth in number of his own, on the beach, would be a very remarkable officer indeed. The British general, to do him justice, like the

British private, is usually cheerfully willing, when he sees his foe, to fight at the earliest moment possible and at any odds.

An officer in one of Huntly's regiments, who tells in the *United Service Magazine* for 1838 the story of the expedition, gives the true explanation of why the British troops did not land at Cadsand. "The soldiers," he says, "were all on deck, and everything was ready for shore-going, when it was discovered there were no boats!" He discusses the interesting question "Why such a needful appendage to the landing of troops should have been overlooked" by everybody. Why, indeed! But the fact was clear. The soldiers could not swim ashore; so while a gale rose, the regiments carried by this division of the fleet had to lie at anchor, and stare ruefully at the beach on which they ought to have landed. Amongst the soldiers themselves the cheerful plan was suggested of running the transports ashore, and landing the men at low water, if only by the process of shooting them over the side like coals; a plan which did not recommend itself to the more practical intelligence of the seamen. The night soon darkened; the tempest blew, and this great section of the fleet lay tossing at its anchors with sea-sick regiments on board unable to land. Thus the first and easiest path to success was missed, and missed by a blunder worthy only of the philosophers of Laputa.



Chatham's left wing, under Sir Eyre Coote, was duly landed on the north side of Walcheren island. On July 30, Hope with his division landed on South Beveland, and might easily have seized the fort at Batz, which commands the junction of the two estuaries of the Scheldt. In that case the French ships under Admiral Missiessy—which at that moment were off Flushing—would have been cut off. But the English did not seize that place until the French admiral had safely carried his ships past it. Even then, had the British forces moved by South Beveland, they might have reached Antwerp almost without resistance. The city, with its fleet and arsenal, lay at their mercy, being still practically without defence.

But the loitering and bemuddled Chatham, too lazy to remember even his instructions, chose to expend his army on a perfectly irrelevant detail—the capture of Flushing. He was instructed in express terms, if he did invest Flushing, to use only part of his force in that business, and to advance simultaneously on Antwerp with his main body. But this involved too great an expense of energy for Lord Chatham, or too serious a peril to his health and his turtle-soup, and the siege of Flushing was undertaken in solemn form. Its commander, General Monnet, was instructed by Napoleon to hold the place to the last extremity, and in this way to detain the English in Walcheren till fever broke out in



their ranks, and to give the French time to arm Antwerp.

Monnet played his part gallantly; but Chatham's troops, when once they were allowed to begin the plain business of fighting, were not to be denied. Ground was broken before Flushing on August 5; on the 11th the English frigates ran past its batteries; on the 12th Sir Richard Strachan took in ten of his big ships, and on the 13th sixty guns from the land batteries, and ten line-of-battle ships from the sea front, were pouring their fire on the doomed town. On the 16th, Monnet surrendered with a garrison of nearly 6000, but not till he had succeeded in detaining Chatham fourteen days in the swamps around Flushing.

But Chatham did more even than Monnet to assist Napoleon's plans. The Emperor was gathering considerable armies for the defence of Antwerp, and was labelling them with great names—"The Army of Antwerp," "The Army of the Tête de Flandres," "The Army of Reserve"—but, on the whole, these were phantom hosts, mere skeletons of regiments, or hasty collections of gendarmes and custom-house officers. One curious letter reveals Napoleon's own estimate of these troops. "Do not attempt," he wrote, "to come to blows with the English. Your National Guards, your conscripts, organised in provisional demi-brigades, huddled pell-mell into Antwerp for the most part without officers,

with an artillery half-formed . . . you will infallibly be beaten! We must oppose to the English nothing but the fever, which will soon devour them all. In a month the English will be obliged to take to their ships." This is exactly what happened, and Chatham enabled Napoleon to carry out his programme by loitering with his divisions in the fever-breeding swamps of Walcheren, instead of pushing resolutely on to Antwerp. While that city was in a flame of agitated activity preparing for a siege, 20,000 good British troops were almost within sight of its steeples, in South Beveland; but they did nothing, and were suffered to do nothing.

Flushing surrendered on August 16, and Chatham commenced to saunter on towards Antwerp, at a pace regulated with due regard to his own turtle-soup and his health. In ten days his headquarters were at Batz, a distance of thirty miles; the average rate of advance being thus three miles a day. He might have reached Antwerp itself in five days, and found himself in its front with a stronger British army than that which fought at Vittoria or at Waterloo. He only reached Batz in ten days. Hope might have seized Batz on August 1; Chatham loitered into it on August 26, and having reached it, he concluded to go no farther.

Bernadotte was by this time in his front with 30,000 men; Antwerp was garrisoned; the French squadron was safe on its farther side. Fever was breaking out

in his rear, 3000 men were already in his hospitals, and Chatham called a leisurely council of war. His generals agreed with him that nothing more was to be done, and Chatham sauntered back to Walcheren. He had wasted fourteen days in taking Flushing, fourteen days more in doing nothing in particular; and on August 29 he reported to the British Cabinet that the expedition must be abandoned. He himself sailed early in September, with the Guards and one or two other regiments, for a land where nobody need be in a hurry, and where turtle-soup could be enjoyed in peace.

The main body of his army, now perishing by hundreds daily, remained. It was for some time intended to at least hold Walcheren, and thus, so to speak, "plug" the Scheldt; but the fever had ample energy, if Lord Chatham had none. The pest season had set in. The troops were supplied with bad water and no medicines, or almost none. Walcheren is one great fever-bed. Much of its soil and that of South Beveland was once "drowned land," and had been laboriously recovered from the sea. The process of recovery consists in building a series of embanked squares, like the cells of a honeycomb, and thus gaining acre by acre on the Scheldt. These embanked squares, while in progress of construction, are mere mud-pans, full of vegetable refuse, where malaria is generated in rankest abundance. In such an atmosphere the unfortunate British troops perished by whole regiments. By the middle of September,



11,000 British troops were fever-stricken. The sick were sent to England with more or less of clumsy despatch. They were carried to the beach, and lay there—whole acres of fever-smitten patients—under the heat of the day and the dews of the night, till they could be embarked, dying in scores while they waited.

The writer of the history of the expedition in the *United Service Magazine* describes how he went one morning to a parade of the regiment. "There was a row of sergeants, some of the band, a group of officers, but not one firelock." The entire regiment was prostrate with fever; and this was the case with many regiments. The regiment to which the officer referred to belonged had only one surgeon; but it was impossible, that functionary decided, to visit all the sick—they must visit him! So he established himself in a sort of watch-box on the quay, and the poor fever-wasted wretches had to crawl to him to get medicine. In a regiment drawn up for parade it was common to see whole companies shaking with ague from head to heel. Strong men were reduced in a few hours to the helplessness of infants. 16,000 men were in hospital at once; 7000 men died; and, according to one computation, out of the entire expedition of 40,000, no less than 35,000 were at one time or another in hospital. An attempt was made to keep a force of 15,000 men in Walcheren itself. "Before six weeks are over," wrote Napoleon, "of



these 15,000 not 1500 will be left;" and that grim forecast seemed likely to be fulfilled. It would have been fulfilled had not the British authorities at last recalled to England the wretched survivors of the mightiest and most stupidly mismanaged expedition that ever left the English shores.

Some 7000 British graves were dug on the muddy islets at the entrance to the Scheldt, and out of those who returned to England not less than 14,000 troops were wrecked in health for the remainder of their lives. When the regiments landed at Dover, and crept on the road towards Hythe, the spectacle of the staggering far-stretching procession of invalids, says "Rifleman Harris," "bore a strong resemblance to the Corunna retreat."

English history records no other military failure quite so swift and so complete. In less than eight weeks a proud and gallant army of 40,000 men was practically blotted out of existence. And the secret of the failure is clear. The expedition was despatched too late; it was under imbecile leadership; it was put in quarrel with Nature itself. An army was encamped in a pest-house, and left to perish there, almost without medicines and medical care. And this within 100 miles of English shores!

The Walcheren expedition had some grave political results. It brought the conspiracy against Castlereagh to a climax, and from that arose the historic duel betwixt Castlereagh and Canning, which drove them

both for a while from public life. But the expedition itself was finely conceived; in scale and strength it left nothing to be desired. And its history deserves to be remembered as proving how useless is the wealth of a great State, and the courage of gallant soldiers, when administered by drivelling imbecility.

It is pleasant to turn from the swamps of Walcheren, and the spectacle of an army perishing for simple lack of leadership, to the great field of the Peninsula, on which Wellington was now to begin those immortal campaigns which are the glory of English military history.

## CHAPTER X

### THE NEW CAMPAIGN IN THE PENINSULA

THERE was a touch of mystery in Napoleon's sudden abandonment at Astorga of the pursuit of Moore's army. The usual reason assigned is that he had received news Austria was preparing for war, and that a conspiracy was fermenting in Paris. But, as a matter of fact, Napoleon lingered ten days at Valladolid, after turning his back on Moore, before he finally started for France; and war with Austria did not break out till April 6.

Wellington always declared that Napoleon's surrender of the pursuit of the British army puzzled him. He judged Napoleon with hard and unfriendly common-sense. Discussing the matter with Croker long afterwards he said: "Was he disinclined *de se froter* against Moore? Did he wish that Soult should try what stuff our people were made of before he risked his own great reputation against us? Or did he despair of driving us out of Corunna? And was the bad news from Vienna (he generally kept bad news a profound secret) now invented or promulgated to excuse his evident reluctance to follow

us up? I cannot account for his not having subtracted from the three weeks he spent in Spain after his return from Astorga, and the three months that, I think, he spent in Paris, half-a-dozen days for so great an object as a victory over the English army, won by himself in person. My own notion is that he was not sure of the victory."

Lanfrey, it is to be noted, agrees in substance with Wellington, that the reason assigned by Napoleon for the abandonment of the pursuit at Astorga was not the real one. The scene of the sudden arrival and reading of urgent despatches was a mere trick. Nothing had happened either in Paris or Vienna to change Napoleon's plans. "His real motive in halting," says Lanfrey, "was that he no longer perceived any way of hindering the embarkation of the English. The decisive blow which he had announced with so much clamour had failed, and he did not care to go forty or fifty leagues farther, over terrible roads, merely to witness their escape, and to bring back, as the only trophy of so toilsome an expedition, 3000 or 4000 stragglers, vanquished by hardship rather than by the sword. He left this unenviable kind of success to Marshals Soult and Ney, and returned himself to Valladolid."

There is no doubt that Napoleon was personally tired of the struggle in Spain. It did not suit his genius. The problem was not merely how to overthrow armies, but how to pacify a nation. This



needed gentleness, tact, unfailing equity, unhurrying patience, and, above all, time. Napoleon loved to dazzle, to strike sudden blows, to crush his enemies as with a mere volition. He could "persuade" only from the cannon's mouth. He was wearied with the slow uncertainties of the Spanish war—a war in which victory seemed to yield no result, and in which he had to contend with a stubborn, smouldering insurrection which knew neither how to resist nor how to yield.

In such a war Napoleon could reap no shining laurels. He flew to a more dramatic field of action, and declared he would "conquer Spain on the Continent." But he carried from Spain a new resentment against the English. He had pledged himself in the eyes of Europe to "plant his eagles on the towers of Lisbon;" and this feat he had certainly not performed. He who had struck down Prussia in a campaign of eight days, after spending three months in Spain, contending with a nation in a sense without armies or generals, had to leave it still unsubdued. And the explanation of it all was found in "those miserable English!" Moore's march to Sahagun had spoiled Napoleon's march on Lisbon.

The temper in which Napoleon left Spain found expression in many ways. He charged Joseph to shoot, hang, or despatch to the galleys, a sufficient number of the population of Madrid to strike a whole-

some terror into the city. "The rabble," he explained to his milder-tempered brother, "like and respect only those whom they fear." Joseph, too, was directed to collect from Spanish monasteries and art galleries fifty masterpieces of the Spanish school and send them to Paris. Then, having executed this characteristic bit of theft, and having despatched his Guard and the bulk of his veterans through the Pyrenees, Napoleon turned his disgusted back on Spain. Joseph was left in nominal command of the French forces in the Peninsula, which still numbered 270,000 men.

In a sense Joseph's position was stronger than before. He was again in Madrid, and nearly 30,000 heads of families in that city had voluntarily taken the oath of allegiance to him. But Joseph's court, like the French armies, had to subsist on the country it had invaded. Little French coin was allowed to trickle through the Pyrenees to his help, and the unhappy Joseph could not, like a French general, live by open plunder. "I have not a penny to give any one," he wrote pathetically to his brother; "I see my guards still wearing the same coats I gave them four years ago." A king of Spain who was guilty, not only of the offence of not being a Spaniard, but of the crime of empty pockets, could hardly expect to be comfortable in Madrid.

The French marshals in Spain, too, were consumed by jealousy of each other. Napoleon's keen

brain taught him that success in Spain was impossible without concert amongst his generals; yet his suspicious nature made it impossible for him to give absolute power of control to any one, even to Joseph. Nominally Joseph was in supreme command; but each French general was instructed to communicate independently with Paris, and took direct instructions from Napoleon. Here, then, was a fatal division of authority. A French marshal received one set of instructions from Joseph, whom he despised, and another from Napoleon, whom he feared, but who was a long way off. Orders, too, which were a fortnight old by the time they reached the general to whom they were addressed, very naturally lost much of their value in the course of transmission. They might not fit the facts which had arisen in the interval.

How bitter were the feuds betwixt the French marshals themselves is not easily realised. It is a curious and significant fact that Soult, Napoleon's ablest and most trusted lieutenant in the Peninsula, seriously entertained the plan of setting up a kingdom of his own in Portugal. He actually printed at Oporto a proclamation announcing himself as "Nicholas I., King of Lusitania and Algarves." Later still Joseph accused him to Napoleon of a design for making himself king of Andalusia. French officers representing Soult, it is known, approached Wellington to learn whether he would aid in such plans.



Napoleon, in a word, wrecked French strategy in Spain because he could never bring himself to entrust to any agent power to enforce a common plan on his generals. He tried, after a fashion which the Aulic Council had made ridiculous, to direct operations in the field from a cabinet 500 miles distant.

Before leaving Spain Napoleon dictated a plan of operations to be pursued. The supreme business was to drive the English out of Portugal and hoist the French flag at Lisbon. Soult was to march from Corunna upon Oporto and thence to Lisbon. All other operations in Spain were made subordinate to this task. Ney was to cover Soult's communications in Galicia; Victor was to stand on guard at Merida ready to aid him in the swoop on Lisbon. Soult, Napoleon calculated, would reach Oporto on February 5, and Lisbon on February 15.

Soult reorganised his troops—sorely tried by the hardships of their pursuit of Moore and the shock of their defeat by him—at Corunna, where he found ample warlike supplies, sent from England for the use of Spanish patriots. But the weather was still against him. The difficulty of supporting troops in a country smouldering with insurrection was great, and Soult only reached Oporto on March 27. He stormed that city; his soldiers broke loose, and no less than 10,000 citizens or soldiers were slain in the horrors of that wild day. The second city in Portugal



was thus in French hands, and on the very day Soult entered Oporto — March 28 — Victor overthrew Cuesta with great slaughter at Medelin, while Sebastiani destroyed a second Spanish army at Ciudad Real. But it was now the beginning of April. The task of the French marshals had proved harder than Napoleon had guessed. Soult was to have been in Lisbon on February 5; that date was nearly two months past and he had only reached Oporto!

Spanish heroism, too, had flamed up, a portent visible to the whole world, in the second siege of Saragossa. Here a city, without fortifications in a scientific sense, was besieged by 35,000 French troops, commanded in succession by Moncey, by Junot, and by Lannes. But Saragossa lent itself perfectly to the characteristic methods of Spanish warfare—the dogged and furious defence of street after street and house after house. “Every house in Saragossa,” says Napier, “was a fort, and every family was a garrison.” The city became one vast complex entangled fortress, and never was defence more ferocious and more heroic. The siege lasted fifty-two days of open trenches, and for twenty-three of these hand-to-hand fighting raged in the streets and houses. Disease slew more of the unhappy and desperate citizens than even the sword. According to Southey, during those fifty-two days 52,000 of the inhabitants of Saragossa perished. The French threw 17,000

bombs into the city, and expended on it more than 160,000 lbs. of gunpowder, and when, on February 21, the city surrendered, the population of Saragossa had shrunk to some 12,000 or 15,000 haggard and pest-poisoned wretches.

The story of Saragossa is one of the classic examples of human courage, and yet it illustrates the eccentric quality of Spanish valour. Spain produced no second Saragossa. And no one can explain why, out of 11,000,000 Spaniards, 50,000 in a particular locality should be found on fire with a courage which recalls Thermopylæ or Albuera, whilst the remainder of the 11,000,000, as far as military exploits were concerned, chiefly distinguished themselves by the promptitude and agility with which, on the slightest occasion, or on no occasion at all, they ran away! Another Saragossa would have saved Spain; but none emerged!

Meanwhile England was ruefully considering whether she should continue her efforts to help Spain. How generous those efforts had been may be judged from the circumstance that, in the six months between June 1808 and January 1809, England had despatched for the help of Spain £3,100,000 in hard cash, more than 200,000 muskets, 150,000 sabres and pikes, 136 cannon and mortars, and 150,000 barrels of gunpowder, besides vast stores of clothing and equipment. Two British armies had been employed in Spain. The first, indeed, won a

respectable victory, but sharply pricked British pride by the Convention of Cintra. The second had spoiled the strategy of Napoleon himself, and had ended a dreadful retreat by winning the victory of Corunna. But the wrecks of Moore's army landed in England—ragged, hunger-bitten, bare-footed, visibly dying of hardship and disease—had sent a thrill of horror across the three kingdoms. Was it worth while maintaining a struggle so cruel and desperate, and one in which success seemed so remote?

But the British temper is stubborn; and Castle-reagh, whatever his faults as a statesman, reflected that quality of the British temper perfectly. It was clear, too, that war was about to break out again on the Continent, where Austria believed that at last, in the person of the Archduke Charles, it had discovered a general whose genius might rebuke that of Napoleon himself. This would give English arms in Spain a new opportunity. The French Emperor, fighting for existence on the Rhine or the Danube, could spare no reinforcements for his legions on the Douro or the Tormes.

Craddock was in command of the scanty and scattered British troops still in Portugal, but the British Cabinet turned to Wellesley for counsel. In a memorandum dated March 9, 1809, Wellesley declared that Portugal "might be defended, whatever the result of the contest in Spain." The Portuguese troops, he advised, should be placed

under British leadership, and with 30,000 British troops, not only could Portugal be held, but the French power in Spain be shaken. The British Cabinet accepted Wellesley's judgment, and on April 22 Wellesley himself landed in Lisbon to begin those great campaigns which have won for him immortal fame.



## CHAPTER XI

### A GREAT SOLDIER

EVERY one is familiar with Wellesley's—or rather, to give him henceforth the more famous and familiar name—with Wellington's appearance at this stage of his career: the medium-sized figure, with its air of erect alertness; the black hair sprinkled with grey, though he was not yet forty; the steadfast eyes, the firm mouth, the high-bridged hawk-like nose. Wellington's face was not beautiful, not even very intellectual, nor specially that of a soldier. The straight line from the temple to the curve of the jaw, it is true, gave a look of severe grace to one angle of his countenance. His sunken cheeks he owed to the loss of his teeth, and his scorn of the dentist's art. But, as studied in any familiar picture, the forehead is low, the features curiously immobile, while the firm thin lips shut like the lid of an iron chest. It is not a generous face; no curve in it is suggestive of sympathy. But there is in it a curious look of calm strength; while the clear hard lines, the falcon-like nose, the curving solid under-jaw, give—exactly as the cutwater of a clipper ship does—an overwhelming impression of

swiftness and strength. It is the face of a man who would cut his way through difficulties as a steel plane, with the energy of steam behind it, cuts its way through wood; and with no more feeling than a steel plane! No one will suspect Wellington of humour, yet Rogers, in his "Recollections," credits him with an almost unsuspected gaiety of mind. "His laugh," he says, "is easily excited, and it is very loud and long, like the whoop of a whooping-cough often repeated." His very mirth, that is, was the mirth of a hard nature.

Wellington had visible and great limitations. It would be unjust to say that he had no sympathy. It is not merely that, according to one tradition, he wept as he saw the dead bodies lying thick on the breach at Badajos; or that he wept again—reluctant iron tears—as he heard the roll-call, sad as a hundred dirges, of the slain at Waterloo. Did not an astonished House of Lords see him weep when he had to announce the death of Peel? But the fountain of either tears or sympathy in Wellington lay very deep, and was not easily reached. He had the reserve of an aristocrat, the shy and awkward pride of his race, that made the expression of emotion hateful to him. Blunt, cool, and dry, sparing of praise, quick to censure, he could inspire confidence, but not enthusiasm, still less love.

Yet, for military purposes, the confidence Wellington kindled in the rank and file of his army was

better, perhaps, than either enthusiasm or love. His soldiers were sure their blood would not be idly shed. Their general would make no blunders. Nobody could outwit him. He would never fail in resource. He would neglect nothing. "That long-nosed beggar that beats the French," was the phrase his soldiers used to describe him. After the bloody struggle of Albuera, Wellington visited the hospital at Elvas, crowded with the wounded of the 29th regiment. "Well, old 29th," he said, "I'm sorry to see so many of you here." "There would have been fewer of us here if you had been with us!" was the reply. That confidence on the part of his soldiers was worth more to Wellington as a general than great reinforcements.

Wellington certainly lacked imagination. His intellect had not the range, the glow, the wizard gleam, the lightning-like swiftness of Napoleon. Yet he had great compensating qualities. There was the clearness as well as the hardness of a crystal in his intellect. If his imagination lacked wings and never left the solid earth, yet it was, within a narrow area, strangely luminous and keen, and was always harnessed to practical uses. When, as a youth of eighteen, he received his commission as ensign in the 41st regiment, almost his first act was to cause a private soldier to be weighed, first in full marching order, with arms and accoutrements, and afterwards without them. He wanted to find out what the



soldier actually had to carry. To some one, long afterwards, who expressed his surprise at the incident, he replied, "Why, I was not so young as not to know that, since I had undertaken a profession, I had better endeavour to understand it." That incident expresses perfectly one feature of Wellington's genius, its grasp of the practical conditions of war, its piercing insight into detail.

Lord Roberts, no mean judge, says that Wellington has been "underrated as a general, and overrated as a man;" and there is no doubt that Wellington's failure as a politician has long served to obscure his magnificent qualities as a soldier. Some one told him once of Lannes' definition of a great general. "The greatest general," said Lannes, "is he who hears more quickly in the thunder, and sees more clearly in the smoke of battle than at other times." Wellington agreed. The highest quality in a general was coolness. "The perfection of practical war," he said, "was to move troops as steadily and coolly on a field of battle as on parade." "Only," added Wellington, "the mind, besides being cool, must have the art of knowing what is to be done and how to do it." That sentence exactly expresses his own genius for war. His brain in the tumult and distraction of a great battle had the coolness as well as the clarity of an ice-crystal. With all human passions at their highest point on every side of him, Wellington rode impassive; and his blunt, unexaggerated, and homely



speech, with no strain of anything exalted in it, has the most curious effect when heard amid the roar of, say, Salamanca or Waterloo. He never talked of "glory." If he had fought a battle under the shadow of the Pyramids, it would never have occurred to him that forty centuries from their summit were contemplating the performance; and he certainly would not have introduced those forty astonished centuries to the British private, or even to his British generals!

At Guinaldo in 1811, Wellington was playing a desperate game of bluff, holding his ground with two weak divisions within reach of Marmont's army, 60,000 strong. He did this to give Craufurd time to fall back. Wellington carried an unclouded face, while his staff was in a mood of great agitation. "You seem quite at your ease," said Alava to him; "why, it's enough to put a man in a fever!" "I have done according to the very best of my judgment all that can be done," said Wellington. "Therefore I care not either for the enemy in the front or for anything they may say at home." Sir William Erskine tells the story of how one morning, in a dense fog, a British division got separated from the rest of the army, Wellington being with it. Some prisoners were brought in, and then it was learnt that the entire French army was in their immediate front. If the fog lifted they were lost. Every one was disturbed; but all that Wellington said was, in the coolest tones,

"Oh, they are all there, are they? Well, we must mind a little what we are about, then!"

A hundred stories might be told illustrative of Wellington's cool, blunt, and, so to speak, unbuttoned habit of speech when in the very crisis of a great battle. And he had pre-eminently the art of "knowing what was to be done and how to do it." He was unsurpassed, that is, in executive genius. Industry, method, simplicity, directness, all in the highest degree, these were the characteristics of his intellect. "Wellington," says Lanfrey, "dazzled no one—but he beat us!"

Napoleon's marshals, Wellington once said, "plan their campaigns just as you might make a splendid set of harness. It looks very well, and answers very well, till it gets broken, and then you are done for! Now I made my campaigns of ropes; if anything went wrong, I tied a knot and went on." The secret of his success, Wellington explained again, lay in "the application of good sense to the circumstances of the moment." In another mood he attributed his success to "always being a quarter of an hour earlier than he was expected." "What is the test of a great general?" Wellington was once asked. "To know when to retreat and to dare to do it," was his reply.

Wellington, though there were some unlovely aspects to his character, had noble moral qualities. Superlatives are the natural language of poetry, and Tennyson's resonant and magnificent "Ode" sings

in notes too high even for Wellington. He was not quite "the last great Englishman," nor was life for him a "long self-sacrifice." In his earlier years, at all events, Wellington had a keen ambition, and a quite adequate sense of his own merits. But ambition in him cooled as it was rewarded, instead of growing, after the usual human fashion, yet more hungry. "Truth-lover was our English Duke," says Tennyson, and that is the simplest statement of fact. No other great character in history, perhaps, ever used speech more simply, or had so obstinate a habit of telling the truth, or a more healthy contempt for lying and liars. It is amusing, indeed, to find that Muffling in 1815, when appointed to represent the Prussian army on Wellington's staff, was solemnly warned by Gneisenau against Wellington's incorrigible habit of lying! By his relations with India and his transactions with the nabobs, Gneisenau told Muffling, Wellington had become so accustomed to duplicity that he was "a master in the art, and able to outwit the nabobs themselves." After marching and camping with Wellington during the Waterloo campaign, however, Muffling puts on record the reverence with which he was inspired by Wellington's character, and especially by "his openness and rectitude." He put a higher value, he declared, on Wellington's good word than on any other honour or distinction he won.

Wellington's loyalty to duty, too, was instinctive and absolute, though his conception of "duty" would



hardly have satisfied a moralist or a poet. Wellington would probably have listened with quite uncomprehending ears to Richard Hooker's fine description of duty, "whose home is in the bosom of God, and whose voice is the harmony of the universe." But of duty as a thing to be done, the work of each day, the only thing possible or thinkable—of this plodding and home-spun virtue—Wellington had the clearest possible vision; it was his law of life. Some one expressed wonder once that he had accepted some post that seemed below his claims. "Why," he said, "I have eaten the King's salt, and must serve him anywhere." And duty was for him "the King's salt."

Gleig gives a picture of Wellington amongst his soldiers during the desperate fighting in the Pyrenees. "He who rode in front was a thin, well-made man, apparently of middle stature, just past the prime of life. His dress was a plain grey frock, buttoned close to the chin; a cocked hat covered with oilskin; grey pantaloons, with boots buckled at the side, and a steel-mounted light sabre. Though I knew not who he was, there was a brightness in his eye which bespoke him something more than an aide-de-camp or a general of brigade; nor was I long left in doubt. There were in the ranks many veterans who had served in the Peninsula during some of the earlier campaigns; these instantly recognised their old leader, and the cry 'Douro! Douro!'—the familiar



title given by the soldiers to the Duke of Wellington—was raised. There was in his general aspect nothing indicative of a life spent in hardships and fatigues; nor any expression of care or anxiety in his countenance; on the contrary, his cheek, though bronzed with frequent exposure to the sun, had on it the ruddy hue of health, whilst a smile of satisfaction played about his mouth, and told far more plainly than words could have spoken how perfectly he felt himself at ease."

No one can realise Wellington's work in the Peninsula, or the magnificent intellectual qualities he displayed there, who does not remember the evil conditions under which that work was done. Napoleon had to reckon with no other will or judgment save his own. He was as absolute as Cæsar. He was his own Minister of State, his own Commander-in-Chief, his own Chancellor of the Exchequer, the sole fountain of promotion and honour to his army. Criticism never became audible to him. The treasures and the forces of two-thirds of Europe were at his absolute disposal. He shaped his strategy in his own brain, made and unmade treaties at his mere pleasure, and moved with the uncriticised freedom and authority of a despot.

Wellington, of course, enjoyed no such autocracy. He was the servant of a Cabinet that gave him much idle advice, but neither money, supplies, nor reinforcements in the measure in which he needed them.

"I knew," said Wellington long afterwards, "that if I lost 500 men without the clearest necessity, I should be brought upon my knees to the House of Commons." His allies were generals who would not obey, soldiers who would not fight, and Governments without honour or loyalty. When the English Ministers of that day—the Portlands, the Percevals, the Liverpools—were weak, as after Talavera and the Walcheren expedition, they were ready to abandon Wellington; when they were strong they neglected him. "There was nothing regular in their policy," as a keen critic said, "but confusion." Repeatedly the war in the Peninsula was brought to the point of actual collapse by mere want of specie; and it illustrates the administrative capacity of the British Government that, as Wellington's brother (the Marquis of Wellesley) complained, they despatched five different agents to purchase dollars for five different services, without any controlling head. Their agents were thus bidding against each other in every European market, and the restrictions as to the price were exactly in inverse proportion to the importance of the service. The agent for the troops in Malta was permitted to offer the highest price. Wellington was restricted to the lowest.

In a sense, Wellington's military operations were the least part of the burden that pressed on his brain. He had to teach English statesmen finance, Spanish juntas truth, the Portuguese regency honesty.

The civil administration of Portugal fell into his hands as a mere detail of the war, and because, otherwise, the nation would have perished beneath the follies and corruption of its own Government. Wellington had to do his great work in the Peninsula in an atmosphere of intrigues, plots, betrayals, jealousies, and incredible stupidities, such as might have shattered the combinations of a Cæsar, or wrecked the patience of William the Silent. His warfare with human selfishness, folly, and obstinacy, was more constant and exhausting than that against the French.

The fighting quality of his Spanish allies has already been described; of the Portuguese soldiers it is sufficient to say that in the earlier stages of the war they were known amongst the British rank and file as "the *vamos*ses," from *vamos*, "let us be off," which they were accustomed to shout before they ran away. It is curious that a bit of American slang can thus be traced down to the early Peninsular campaigns! Later the Portuguese rank and file under British teaching attained a respectable fighting quality; not quite so excellent, however, as might be imagined from Wellington's despatches. He praises them there, in terms in excess of their real performances, for the sake of encouraging them.

Wellington, in a word, had to run counter to national habits,—the growth of centuries, and rooted



in national character—of a singularly obstinate type. He had to teach Spaniards obedience, and Portuguese energy; to make intriguers honest, and idlers diligent, and the most loitering race in Europe prompt. And he had to do all this without the usual resources of a great commander, without the power, that is, to promote for good service or dismiss for bad service, as his personal act.

His allies had no sympathy with each other. Portugal was indifferent to the fate of Spain; Spain regarded Portugal with contempt. At times, indeed, Wellington complained that Spaniards and Portuguese hated each other more than they both hated the French. The early enthusiasm with which the English were welcomed in the Peninsula soon died out under the stern and hard experience of war. By the Portuguese of the upper classes, at least, the British were regarded, says Napier, "as a captain regards galley-slaves. Their strength was required to speed the vessel, but they were feared and hated." During the clouded days when the British fell back from Burgos, even the cool-headed Wellington more than once expressed his fear that a civil war would break out between the Portuguese peasantry on the one side and the British and Spaniards on the other. Both Spanish and Portuguese generals, during the same stage of the war, it may be added, were in secret communication with Joseph, arranging terms of betrayal.

Seldom, in brief, has any great general waged war



under more adverse conditions than Wellington did in the Peninsula. He had to frame laws, organise finance, administer provinces, instruct politicians in their own art, and keep Parliaments from meddling, as well as watch the strategy of French marshals and the movements of French columns.

Wellington came to the Peninsula with exactly the training that fitted him for the campaigns before him. In Flanders he had learned endurance and patience. India had taught him confidence in himself and given initiative to his tactics. It had made him a diplomatist, and an unsurpassed manager of men. Had he come to Spain with nothing but a soldier's training and a soldier's gifts, he might have failed; but India had taught him to be a statesman as well. Wellington at first, it is true, lacked one qualification for his task. He was ignorant of Spanish character. He did not know with what diligence Spanish juntas could lie, on what a scale Spanish generals could blunder, and with what promptitude and energy Spanish soldiers, leaderless and undrilled, could run away.

But he quickly learned all this. The bloody campaign of Talavera taught him the lesson. The hunger that wasted his army, the delays that taxed his patience, the broken pledges that wrecked his strategy, burned the knowledge in. He came back from his first campaign with the bitter words, "I have fished in many troubled waters; but Spanish troubled waters I will never try again!"

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CAMPAIGN OF TALAVERA

WELLINGTON, on landing at Lisbon, found at his disposal a force of 26,000 men. Three French armies confronted him. Soult to the north held Oporto with over 20,000 men, which the junction of Ney and Mortier would bring up to nearly 60,000. Victor, at Merida, to the west, stood ready to move on Lisbon with a force of 24,000 men; betwixt the two, and connecting them, stood Lapisse at Salamanca, with 6000 men. Lapisse, however, presently marched southward, and joined Victor, bringing that general's forces up to 30,000 men. Lapisse's march simplified the problem for Wellington. He had now Soult to the north, and Victor to the west; both were to converge upon him and crush him. But Wellington held the interior position, and he could fall upon either force and destroy it before the other reached the field of action. Victor was eighteen marches distant, Soult practically less than five. He held the second city in Portugal; and, acting on his policy of clearing Portugal of the French, and using it as a base of operations against the French



MARSHAL SOULT

*From a sketch by G. B. CAMPION*





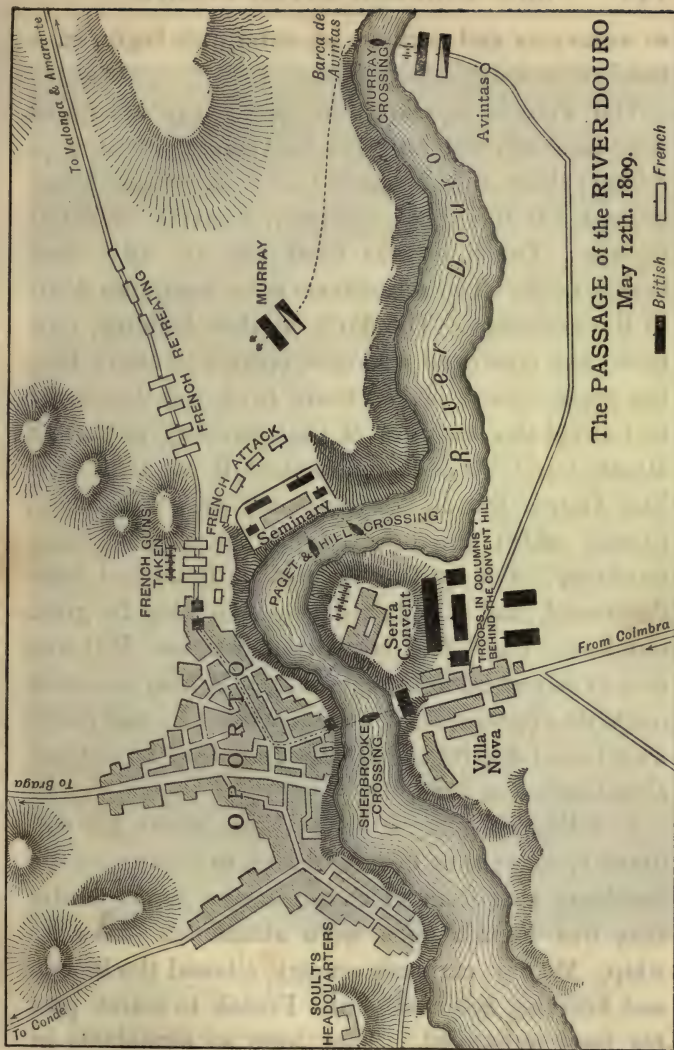
power in Spain, Wellington resolved to advance against Soult.

The British general moved swiftly. On May 2 he was at Coimbra with 25,000 men; on the 12th he was in sight of Oporto. Here was a great city, held by 20,000 French veterans, under Napoleon's ablest and most trusted marshal, and between Wellington and his foe rolled the Douro, a deep and swift river, 300 yards wide. Soult, however, had been ill served by his outposts, and was in a curious state of ignorance as to Wellington's movements. He knew, indeed, that the Englishman was moving on Oporto, and he had drawn every boat to the French side of the river; but he did not know that his enemy was within striking distance. He expected, moreover, the English to make their appearance from the sea, and was eagerly watching the river seawards, at the very moment Wellington was preparing to cross the stream at his back. The Douro, immediately opposite the city, curved sharply round a point on which stood what was called the Serra Rock, crowned by a great convent. And at eight o'clock on the morning of May 12, Wellington's troops were drawn up in silent ranks under the screen of this rock. Soult, uneasily doubtful as to the effects of Wellington's stroke, was already despatching his heavy baggage by the Valonga road, in case he had to abandon the city.

Wellington studied the situation with the stern,

sure gaze of a great captain. Immediately opposite his position, on the French side of the river, stood a huge, isolated building called the Seminary. On one side it touched the river, on the other it overlooked the Valonga road. Wellington despatched Murray with a brigade of infantry, the 14th Dragoons, and two guns, to cross the river by a ford, or by boats, three miles up its course; he secretly placed eighteen guns on the Serra Rock itself, so as to sweep the face of the Seminary on the other side of the river. A barber—who little knew he was making history—had crossed the river from the city in a tiny boat. This was seized, and Colonel Waters, with a couple of companions, pulled coolly across the stream to the French side, discovered four good-sized boats stranded in the mud, and brought them back to the English bank.

It was now ten o'clock. So strangely careless was Soult, or so strangely mistaken, that he had not yet discovered Wellington's presence behind the Serra Rock. He had, indeed, been warned at six o'clock that morning of the British approach, but had sent no cavalry pickets out. As soon as the first boat Waters had secured reached the English bank, the fact was reported to Wellington. "Well, let the men cross," was his cool reply; and twenty-five men of the Buffs stepped into the boat under an officer, quietly pulled across the river, and entered by a door in the Seminary walls. Never before was



The PASSAGE of the RIVER DOURO  
May 12th. 1809.

■ British □ French

Walker & Boutwell sc.

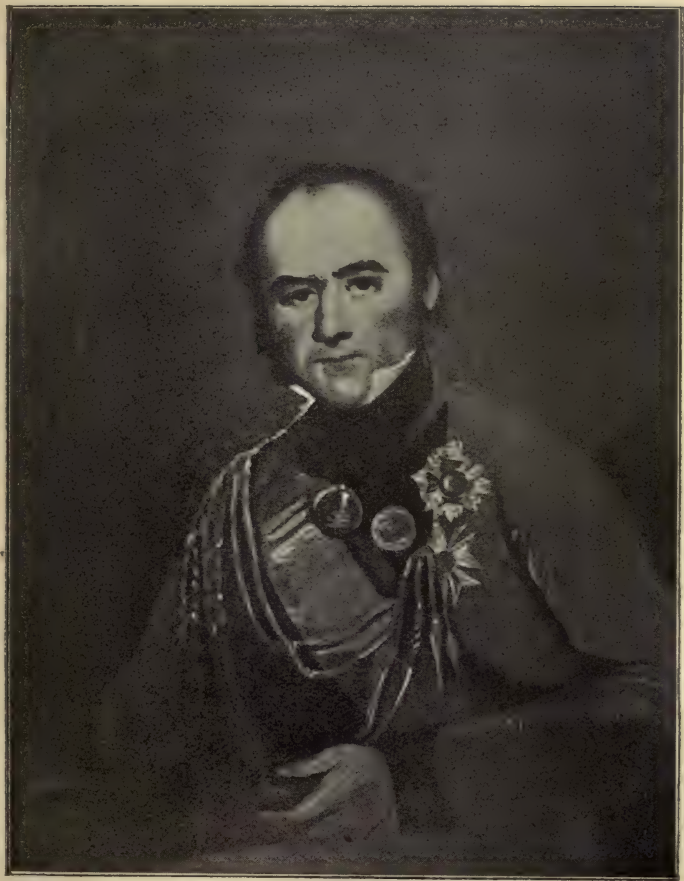


so audacious and perilous an enterprise begun in a fashion so cool!

The French sentries were apparently asleep, or were carelessly watching the long column of baggage rolling along the Valonga road. A second barge crossed, a third. Then suddenly, a tumult awoke in Oporto. French drums filled the air with their brazen rattle. The skirmishers came swarming down to the Seminary. The Buffs in that building, now under the command of Paget, opened an angry fire; the great battery on the Serra Rock was uncovered and swept the left front of the Seminary, so that no attack could be delivered against it on that face. The French fire on the Seminary grew vehement; cannon added their deep bellow to the crackling musketry. But by this time other boats had been discovered, and the British were crossing in great numbers. Paget had fallen wounded, and Hill was now in command in the Seminary. Murray's column made its appearance on the French bank; and Soult, who feared his retreat northward might be cut off, abandoned the town.

The English guns from the Serra smote his columns cruelly; they had, moreover, to pass under the Seminary wall, from which streamed a fire so deadly that five French guns were abandoned under its whip. Murray, curiously enough, allowed the broken and hurrying columns of the French to march past his front unharmed. They were so formidable in





GENERAL THE HON. SIR EDWARD PAGET

*From a picture in the possession of MRS. PAGET, of Lowlands, Farnham .*



numbers, that he seemed to fear to attract their notice. Charles Stewart and Major Hervey, however, rode, with two squadrons of the 14th, into the mass of the French, captured General Laborde, and wrought great mischief. But it was a handful of dragoons charging an army, and the English horsemen were at last driven off with loss. But, at the expense of a little over 100 in killed and wounded, Wellington had crossed a river, broad and deep and swift, in the face of an enemy scarcely inferior to himself in numbers, and had driven Soult, with a loss of 500 men and five guns, in headlong retreat out of Oporto. It was a brilliant stroke of war.

And the leap upon Oporto was only a detail in Wellington's strategy. He had thrust forward Beresford, with his Anglo-Portuguese and a corps of Spaniards under Silvera, to seize the roads by which Soult must reach Amarante. Another force was marching to cut off his retreat into Galicia. Thus Soult was in sore straits. He had a victorious enemy both in his front and in his rear. The Douro was on his right; on his left was a wild and apparently trackless range of hills, the Sierra del Cathalina.

Soult, in this critical situation, showed the daring and the judgment of a great soldier. He abandoned his baggage and stores, destroyed his artillery, and by what were little better than goat-tracks, passed the mountains and gained Pombira, where he was

joined by Loison's division. But Wellington was thundering closely and fiercely on his rear. To reach Braga, Soult had once more to take to the hills, destroying the guns and baggage of Loison's division. The guerillas vexed his flanks; the British threatened to outmarch him, and cut him off from his junction with Ney at Lugo. In wild tumult, the two armies, pursuers and pursued, pressed on. Soult, in fact, in this fiercely urged retreat, endured more hardships and suffered incomparably greater military dishonour than Moore in his disastrous retreat to Corunna.

On May 18, Soult's hard-pressed columns reached Lorence. His soldiers were shoeless, ragged, without artillery or baggage; many of the troops, indeed, were without muskets. Only ten weeks before, Soult had marched from Lorence with a force which, counting the additional detachments which afterwards joined him, numbered 26,000 men and fifty-eight guns. He was advancing on Lisbon to drive the English into the sea! Now his shattered columns came flying back as though driven by a whirlwind, leaving behind them all their guns and baggage, and more than 6000 men slain or captured! It was clear that Wellington and his English could strike with sudden and shattering force. In what was practically a campaign of ten days, the English general had delivered Portugal, and driven the French army, under a famous Marshal, in reeling and ruinous



defeat along the very roads which had witnessed the march of Moore's unhappy columns.

But there remained the more formidable task of dealing with Victor's force, and Wellington fell back on Oporto. Thence he marched at speed to Abrantes, where he halted to gather up his reinforcements and concert plans with Cuesta. In his brilliant campaign on the Douro his losses did not exceed 300 men, but sickness now raged in his camp. He had 4000 men in hospital. Only when 8000 new troops reached him from England did he move forward.

On June 27 Wellington entered Spain with a force of 21,000 men and thirty guns. Cuesta's forces numbered 28,000, of the usual uncertain Spanish quality; while Cuesta himself, an old man, semi-imbecile, and cursed with all the obstinacy, and not quite the intelligence, of a Spanish mule, was an ally of the worst possible quality. And it was with such an ally Wellington was advancing against the marshals and armies of France! The British general, it is to be noted, was curiously mistaken as to the strength of the French armies. The forces in front of him under Victor and Joseph exceeded 50,000 men. Soult, on his flank, had now been joined by Ney and Mortier, and formed a well-equipped force of 54,000 men. Wellington, to put it briefly, had committed himself, with some 20,000 British and 38,000 Spanish troops, to a campaign in the narrow, entangled valley of the Tagus, barred at its western end by an army

of 50,000 French veterans, while another army of 50,000 was gathering on his flank and rear. In the shock of actual battle, the Spaniards were practically to be counted out, but Wellington did not even yet quite realise this. He had not yet learned by experience of what obstinacy Spanish generals were capable, or of what cowardice Spanish troops. He ran an imminent risk of finding himself, with no other than his own 22,000 troops to rely upon, crushed between two French armies, numbering over 100,000 men.

At the very moment when, with numbers so inadequate, Wellington was facing risks so terrible, the English Cabinet, it is worth while remembering, had despatched one force of 12,000 men, under Sir John Stuart, to play at soldiering in Italy, and 40,000 magnificent troops to perish ingloriously of disease in the marshes at Walcheren! Wellington might easily have had 80,000 troops on the Tagus instead of less than 25,000. In that event who can doubt that all the succeeding campaigns of the Peninsula would have been unnecessary, and Waterloo itself might have been ante-dated by five years!

Wellington quickly began to realise the difficulties created by the almost incredible stubbornness of Cuesta and the equally unimaginable faithlessness of the Spanish juntas. Cuesta would neither march, nor halt, nor fight when his ally wished. He fell into semi-imbecile sleep in the midst of conferences

with his brother general. On July 22, Victor, with his single corps, lay within reach of the Anglo-Spanish army. It was agreed to attack him next day, but when Wellington wished to arrange the details, Cuesta went to bed. The British were under arms at three o'clock the next morning, but his staff dare not wake Cuesta till seven o'clock. Then that enterprising general drove up in a carriage drawn by six horses to the British headquarters, and—according to one version—announced that it was Sunday, and he had conscientious scruples against fighting on that day! When, however, later in the day, the French began to retire, Cuesta consented to attack, and moved forward in his lumbering coach-and-six to examine the ground. Presently his coach halted, Cuesta sat down in the shade of a tree, and went peacefully and hopelessly to sleep again! “If Cuesta had fought when I wanted him,” said Wellington afterwards, “it would have been as great a battle as Waterloo, and would have cleared Spain of the French.”

Wellington's difficulties, when linked to such an ally, may be guessed. But, in addition, his army ran an imminent risk of perishing from mere starvation. He had entered Spain with the most eager and solemn assurances from the Junta that provisions—all to be duly paid for in English gold—would be found for his troops. But Spanish promises, as Wellington found, were worthless. Trusting to them



was building on mere vapour. The two armies united on July 22; during the month which followed, the English troops received only ten days' bread, and an even smaller meat supply. Nearly 2000 horses perished for want of forage. The very offal of goats was eagerly bought in the British camp as food. Wellington could procure from the Spanish authorities smooth promises, plausible excuses, ingenious lies of every description, but no food; and this while Spanish magazines were full.

The British soldier has many virtues, but the capacity for accepting starvation with pensive resignation, and by the side of allies who are well fed, does not belong to him; and out of the experiences of British soldiers in their first joint campaign with the Spanish was bred a long-enduring anger, which bore some dreadful after results. According to Napier, the excesses of British soldiers when Badajos and San Sebastian were stormed are explained by the anger bred of Spanish selfishness and neglect in the Talavera campaign.

Of Cuesta's obstinacy a single specimen may be given. Joseph and Victor had joined forces near Toledo, and now formed an army of over 50,000 men, which barred the march of Wellington and Cuesta on Madrid. Soult, with an equal force, was striking at their flank. It was necessary to fall back on some strong defensive position, where alone the Spaniards could sustain the shock of battle. But Cuesta






# Battle of TALAVERA

at the period of the final attack,  
28th. July 1809.

FRENCH ARMY 1 P.M. JULY 27TH.

Cav. Inf.

-  English
-  French
-  Spanish



refused to move. At Alcabon the French cavalry roughly charged some Spanish infantry, and the entire Spanish army was on the point of dissolving in mere flight. Night fell on a scene of wild confusion. Wellington urged Cuesta in the strongest terms to fall back on Talavera while the English covered his retreat. But advice and exhortations were vain. That the British general urged any course was sufficient reason for Cuesta's refusing to adopt it.

On the next morning Wellington rode again to Cuesta's quarters, and pointed out to him that he was in a desperate position. The first shot fired would be the signal for his troops to dissolve. For himself, he was resolved to fall back. Cuesta met every suggestion with a mulish refusal. The British began their march, leaving the obstinate Spaniard to his fate; the French cavalry were in sight, coming quickly on. Then Cuesta yielded, but, says Napier, "addressing his staff with frantic pride, he boasted 'he had first made the Englishman go down on his knees!'"

With his sure glance, Wellington had selected Talavera as the scene of what was to prove one of the most picturesque fights, and well-nigh the most bloody, in the long roll of Peninsular battles. Talavera stands on the bank of the Tagus. Parallel to the Tagus, and at a distance of two and a half miles from it, was a mountain chain, with a deep ravine, a sort of huge natural ditch, at its foot. A series of small hills, rounded and steep, stretches from the river

almost to the lip of this ravine, one hill, bolder and more rugged than the rest, standing like an outpost about half a mile from it. Wellington made this line of hills his position. It barred the whole valley of the Tagus against the French. The Spaniards formed his right wing. Their front was covered by deep ditches, a convent, a tangle of breastworks, &c., and was practically unassailable. Campbell's division in two lines came next the Spaniards; Sherbrook's division—the Guards and the Germans—stood next; Hill's division formed the extreme British left, and reached the edge of the deep ravine betwixt the mountain range and the rounded hills. By some oversight the terminal hill itself was not at first occupied by the British, and round it eddied the chief fury of the great battle.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE FIGHT AT TALAVERA

THE story of Talavera is crowded with dramatic and stirring incident, and few battles have ever been waged with sterner courage or more dreadful slaughter. Writing six months after the fight, Wellington himself, who never strayed into idle superlatives, wrote: "The battle of Talavera was the hardest-fought of modern times. The fire at Assaye was heavier while it lasted, but the battle of Talavera lasted for two days and a night!" The great tactical feature of the fight was the circumstance that, practically, the Spaniards took no part in it. Their single contribution was an attempt to effect a general stampede!

It is idle to deny the quality of courage to the Spaniards. Spanish infantry under Alva's iron discipline was once the terror of Europe. But throughout the struggle in the Peninsula Spanish valour was of an eccentric quality. It came and went in spasms. At Talavera it was a vanishing quantity! The Spanish regiments stood behind their almost impregnable position and watched, no



doubt with keen interest, but without much active participation, the swaying fortunes of the battle betwixt the English and the French. Hill, the most just-minded of men, says that at Talavera "there really appeared something like a mutual agreement between the French and the Spaniards not to molest each other!" But this practically resolved the fight into a struggle between some 21,000 British and German troops with thirty guns, as against 55,000 French veterans with eighty guns.

The feature of the French tactics, and perhaps the secret of their failure, was the unrelated and scattered character of the attacks they delivered. At three o'clock on July 27, the foremost French battalions came upon the outposts of the British left. The 87th and 88th, who formed these outposts, consisted of young soldiers, who were clumsily handled, fired in the confusion upon each other, and were sadly shaken. Wellington himself, in the tumult of the fight, was well-nigh made a prisoner. The 45th, "a stubborn old regiment," with the 60th Rifles, checked the eager French, and the British fell sullenly back, with a loss of 400 men. Colonel Donkin with his brigade now occupied the hill on the extreme British left.

At this stage of the fight the French light cavalry rode forward on that part of the line held by the Spanish, and began a pistol skirmish, with a view of discovering Cuesta's formation. The

Spaniards were nerve-shaken. They fired one far-heard and terrific volley into space, and then before its sound had died away, no less than 10,000 of them, or nearly a third of Cuesta's entire force, betook themselves to flight! The infantry flung away their muskets, the gunners cut their traces and galloped off on their horses; baggage carts and ammunition waggons swelled the torrent of fugitives. One-third of Wellington's battle line seemed tumbling, at the crack of a few French pistols, into mere ruin! The Spanish adjutant-general led the fugitives; Cuesta himself, in his carriage drawn by nine mules, brought up their rear. The unexaggerative Wellington says these flying Spaniards were "frightened only by the noise of their own fire. Their officers went with them." It may be added that in all their terror these breathlessly flying Spaniards retained composure enough to plunder the baggage of the British army as they fled to the rear, while its British owners were fighting and dying for Spain at the front!

The spectacle of 10,000 infantry all running away at once might well have shaken the composure of any general; but Wellington launched some squadrons of English cavalry on the advancing French; such of the Spaniards as still held their position opened a brisk fire, and the French in their turn fell back. Cuesta, by this time fallen into a paroxysm of rage, sent his cavalry at a gallop to head

the fugitives and drive them back to their position. Some 6000 Spanish infantry, however, had run too fast and too far to be recalled.

Meanwhile Victor, who knew the ground well and was of an impatient spirit, saw that the hill on the British left was weakly occupied and was the key of the whole position, and resolved to make a dash at it. The French came on at the quick-step, and stormed up the steep slope with magnificent courage. Ruffin's division led. Villatte's was in support.

The British fought stubbornly, but the French were not to be denied, and their numbers were so great that they swept round the flank of the British regiments and seized the summit. Hill was in command of this part of the line, and a curious incident marked the beginning of the struggle. As Hill tells the story, he was standing by Colonel Donnellan of the 48th, when in the dusk he saw some men come over the hilltop and begin to fire at them. "I had no idea," says Hill, "'the enemy were so near.' I said to Donnellan, 'I was sure it was the old Buffs, as usual, making some blunder.'" Hill rode off to stop the firing, and found that he had ridden into a French regiment! His aide-de-camp, Fordyce, was shot, Hill's own bridle was seized by a French soldier. But breaking roughly loose, Hill galloped down the slope of the hill, and brought up the 29th to support the 48th.



The 29th came on coolly, but with great resolution. The French were before them in the dusk, a black and solid mass, from which came a tempest of shouts. The 29th went forward till almost at bayonet-touch with the enemy, and then delivered a murderous volley. The sudden flash of the muskets lit up the faces of the French soldiers and their gleaming arms, and the long line seemed to crumble under that fierce blast of musketry fire. Then with a triumphant shout the 29th drove the French down the hill-slope by actual bayonet-push. The gallant Frenchmen came on again and yet again. The hill rose in the darkness a black and vaguely defined mass. But those who watched the fight from the distance could see sparkling high in the air on the hill-slope the two waving lines of incessantly-darting flashes, that now seemed to approach each other, and then drew farther apart; now crept higher in the darkness, and then sank lower. Towards midnight the battle died away; but in that stubborn contest—often waged hand to hand—the British lost 800 men, the French 1000.

During the night Wellington brought some guns to this hill, realising that the fate of the battle hung on its possession. Victor, on the other hand, grown only more obstinate from failure, persuaded Joseph to allow him to make a fresh attack in the morning. All night from the hill the listening English heard the rumble of guns in front of them. Victor was



posting all his artillery on the hill opposite that held by his foe, so as to sweep its flanks and crest with a heavy fire.

In the early dawn a single gun boomed sullenly from the French lines. It was the signal! The battle instantly reawoke. The French battalions dashed from the shelter of the trees in the valley, and swarmed up the front and flanks of the hill, while twenty-two guns scourged with fire its crest. The 29th were lying down in line, slightly below the summit; Wellington himself stood by the colours of the regiment, watching the eagerly ascending French. Just as the French infantry reached the crest, and their own guns necessarily ceased firing, the 29th leaped up, a long, steady line, curving with the shape of the hill; their muskets fell to the level, and a dreadful and rolling volley rang out. Then with a shout, the right wing of the 29th and the entire battalion of the 48th flung themselves on the French, and drove them with fierce bayonet-thrusts down the hill into a muddy stream at its base, whose sluggish current was choked by the bodies of the slain and reddened with their blood.

But on either flank of the hill the French were eagerly climbing. The English officers restored their line, and charged the French again and yet again, driving them down the slope. Still the Frenchmen, re-forming their columns, came on as gallantly as ever. Hill himself reckoned that the position was

assailed by two French divisions, numbering not less than 7000 each. The stubborn English, however, though outnumbered overwhelmingly, clung to the hill. Time after time, some officer, with bared head and brandished sword, gallantly leading a cluster of the 29th or of the 48th, would run forward and drive back the French in their immediate front. The British fell fast, Hill himself was wounded. At last the French, their fierce energy outworn, gave way. They had lost in forty minutes' desperate fighting more than 1500 men; their formation seemed to crumble; their shaken battalions ebbed in confusion down the hill.

Then followed nearly three hours' curious pause in the battle. The French generals were in council. Jourdan, Joseph's military adviser, urged that the French should fall back, and wait till Soult made himself felt on Wellington's communications. The British must then retreat, and then would come the French opportunity. Even if Ney had not yet come up from Astorga with his corps, Soult with 40,000 men could be at Placencia by July 30, ready to strike at Wellington's line of retreat. To fight on the 28th or 29th was to throw away a great strategical advantage. But Joseph was trembling for his capital. Victor was sore with defeat; his blood was heated with the fight. He urged that the fatal hill should be attacked a third time, and that Sebastiani should assault the British centre and right at the same time.

If that combination failed, he said, they might give up making war!

Wellington, during this pause in the fight, sat on the summit of the fiercely contested hill, watching the French lines. Donkin came up to him as he sat, with an alarming message, sent in by Albuquerque, who was in command of the Spanish cavalry. Cuesta, the warning ran, was "betraying" his ally. Wellington listened to the message with imperturbable coolness. "Very well," he answered; "you may return to your brigade!" What Cuesta might, or might not, do could not shake the British general's iron coolness. Perhaps he thought no "betrayal" could be more mischievous than Cuesta's "assistance!"

Meanwhile, a sort of "truce of God" was established betwixt the rank and file of the two armies. They were parched with thirst, and the rivulet at the foot of the hill beckoned them. The men crowded on each side to the water's edge; they threw aside their caps and muskets, and chatted to each other in broken French, and still more fragmentary English, across the stream. Flasks were exchanged, hands shaken. Then the bugle or the rolling drum called the men back to their colours, and the fight awoke once more.

Eighty guns broke into fire from the French lines. On the French left a great column, like some broad, majestic human river, edged with glittering steel, flowed out of the wood, surged swiftly forward, and



broke in a sort of spray of flame on the British centre. This was held by Campbell's division, with Mackenzie's brigade in support. The regiments there had watched the long fight on the British left till their temper had risen to something like fury. They broke into loud shouts as the French came on,—the shout that moved Turenne's admiring wonder when he first saw English soldiers move into battle—met their foes with fiery courage, crumpled up their front, scourged their flanks with angry volleys, and drove them back in confusion with the loss of ten guns.

A new attack on the British left was meanwhile being organised. Villatte's division, with two regiments of light cavalry in support, was crossing the British front to join in the attack, and Wellington sent at them Anson's cavalry brigade, consisting of the 23rd Light Dragoons and the 1st German Hussars. Gallantly rode the two regiments. The ground seemed level before them; their enemy was in clear sight. The British infantry regiments cheered the horsemen as they swept past. Several lengths in front of the 23rd, Colonel Elley, conspicuous from the colour of his horse, a beautiful grey, led. Suddenly it was discovered that in the low brushwood through which the cavalry were now galloping, gaped a sharp and deep ravine. Elley reached it first, going at speed; to check his horse or turn was impossible. He rode straight at the



great ditch. His gallant horse leapt it; then Elley turned with a warning gesture to check his men. But the galloping line was now on the edge of the ravine. Some leaped it; some tumbled into it; others scrambled through it and over it. And broken thus into clusters, the horsemen dashed at the French squares, rode through their fire, flung themselves furiously on the French light cavalry beyond, and shattered them with their charge.

The Germans reached the edge of the fatal ravine a few moments later than the British. The accepted tradition is that their Colonel, Arentschild, a war-wise veteran, reined in on the brink of the ditch, saying, "I will not kill my young mans," while the hotter-blooded 23rd crashed through the ravine and rode on to attack an army in position. The "History of the King's German Legion," however, refutes that story. The ravine in front of the hussars, it says, was from six to eight feet deep and from twelve to eighteen feet wide, and the Germans rode at it as resolutely as the dragoons themselves, but with not quite the same speed, and having crossed, they did not expend themselves in attempting an impossible feat. The fiery English dragoons were by this time racing past the front of the French squares upon the brigade of chasseurs in their rear, which, as we have seen, they broke. But, in turn, they were assailed by a regiment of Polish lancers, and only scattered groups reached the British line again.

It was a mad charge, as heroic as Balaclava. Out of a little over 400 dragoons, no less than 207 men and officers were left on the field; of the German hussars, only thirty-seven fell, and these figures show how unequal were the risks dared by the two regiments. The dragoons had joined just three weeks before, and the morning after the battle they could only assemble 100 men on parade. But the charge was not wasted. It arrested the march of Villatte's division, and prevented it joining the attack on the British left.

The attack on that hill was raging afresh by this time, but with no better success than at first. In the British centre, however, the French gained an advantage, which, for a moment, seemed fatal. Lapisse fell with great resolution on Sherbrook's division, his attack being heralded by a dreadful artillery fire. The Guards met the French eagerly, broke them, tumbled them back, and pushed fiercely on their rear. There was no holding the Guards in hand. They pushed recklessly on, themselves disordered with the ardour of their advance, till, suddenly, on front and flank, the French batteries opened on them an overpowering fire. The broken Guards reeled; the French reserves came eagerly into the fight. The Guards, as they fell back, jostled roughly on the Germans in support, shook their formation, and, for a moment, the British centre was completely broken. No less than 500 of the Guards had fallen.

It was the critical moment of the fight; and then it was seen for how much, in war, a great general counts.

Wellington had watched the too eager pursuit of the Guards; he knew what would surely follow, and while the Guards were still in the rapture of their onfall, he had set the 29th in movement from the hill they had held so long, to cover the gap in the centre made by the too rash advance of Sherbrook's men. At the last moment, Wellington halted the wasted and scanty lines of the 29th, and took forward the 48th instead. That famous regiment came up, a long and steady line, as the Guards and Germans were being driven back in tumult and disorder. The 48th wheeled steadily back by companies, and let the broken mass sweep past them; then falling swiftly into line again, they moved forward, pouring on the French swift and repeated volleys, while the Guards and Germans instantly rallied behind them. Lapisse himself had fallen, mortally wounded, and his column drew sullenly back. The great fight was over.

If we omit the fighting on the 27th, the struggle on the 28th may be condensed into Napier's terse sentences: "30,000 French infantry vainly strove for hours to force 16,000 British soldiers, who were, for the most part, so recently drafted from the militia that many of them still bore the distinctions of that force on their accoutrements." And they failed! The slaughter was cruel. The British lost in killed



and wounded, 6200 men and officers—not far short of one-third of their whole number. The loss of the French reached 7400. The Spanish claimed to have lost 1200 in killed and wounded, but these figures included the losses of the 26th and 27th, and even then were doubtful. Cuesta, indeed, had arranged on the 29th to shoot sixty officers and 400 men of his own troops for the crime of running away the previous day. With great trouble Wellington persuaded him to be content with shooting six officers and forty men, by way of encouraging the others.

As night fell, the grass on the slopes of the hills where the battle had raged took fire. It was long, dense, and very dry; the red flames ran, a broad front of dancing fire, over the fields where the dead and wounded lay thickly. The British were utterly exhausted. The men were without food; they had borne the strain of battle for many hours. In the middle of the fight, indeed, a soldier addressed Wellington himself, and said, "It was very hard they had nothing to eat," and asked they might be allowed to go down and fight, "for when they were fighting they forgot their hunger!" But when the fight was over, hunger awoke again with cruel keenness. At nine o'clock on the morning after the battle, for example, the 29th, with waving colours but with wasted lines, marched slowly down from the hill they had held. They had practically fought on that rough summit for two



days, and it was strewn with the bodies of 186 officers and men from its ranks.

But just at that hour, Craufurd's Light Division, consisting of the 43rd, 52nd, and 95th regiments, marched into the British camp. In twenty-six hours these three regiments had covered sixty-two miles, under an almost intolerable sun, each man carrying from fifty to sixty pounds weight on his back. And in that amazing march only seventeen men fell out of the ranks! They met thousands of Spanish fugitives on the road, and were told incessantly that the English were defeated and Wellington slain, &c. Yet, without pause or break, these gallant regiments pressed on to join their comrades, and reached the scene of the battle in perfect fighting order.

Each soldier, it must be remembered, carried a musket, 80 rounds of ammunition, a greatcoat, a blanket, a knapsack, with kit, canteen, haversack, bayonet, &c. ; a load which, over a distance so great and in a time so short, might have taxed the carrying capacity of a horse. Many of the men, it is to be added, were faint with hunger ; all endured extreme anguish from thirst and heat.

Much controversial ink has been shed as to the exact facts of this famous march, but the truth seems to be at last proved beyond reasonable doubt. The march was made practically in two sections. A march of twenty-four miles ended at Oropeso

on the forenoon of July 28, having been completed before the news of battle reached the regiments. When the tidings came, they immediately resumed their march, pressed on, with a brief halt, all night, and reached Talavera before noon on the 29th. They were short of food and water; the heat was excessive; the men were heavily burdened, yet they covered sixty-two miles in twenty-six hours.

French rhetoric turned Talavera into a victory for the French arms. A bulletin was issued announcing that the English had been cut up and destroyed. But Napoleon had written too many bulletins to believe one of them—especially one written in French. "Truth," he wrote indignantly to Joseph, "is due to *me*!"—whatever economy of truth might be practised in the case of others! He had Wellington's and Joseph's accounts of the battle, and he implicitly believed the English version. Wellington said he had captured so many guns; Joseph denied the French had lost any; and Napoleon told Joseph bluntly he believed Wellington. Victor himself declared to an English officer taken prisoner, that, much as he had heard of the fighting quality of the British soldier, he could not have believed that any men could have been led to attacks so desperate as some he had witnessed made by the British at Talavera.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MASSENA AND WELLINGTON

THE stern and bloody fight of Talavera, with the movements that preceded and followed it, decided Wellington's whole after policy in the Peninsula. He had tested Spanish soldiery, and would never again risk a campaign in dependence on Spanish allies. Cuesta, as far as the English were concerned, though he had ample supplies in hand, would neither give food to the living nor help to bury the dead. When Wellington marched to meet Soult, now threatening his rear, Cuesta took charge of the English wounded. But twelve hours afterwards there came a whisper that Victor was advancing. The English wounded, in defiance alike of good faith and humanity, were at once abandoned, and Cuesta and his troops, with all the tumult and confusion of a herd of cattle broken loose, came tumbling, as if for safety, on Wellington's track.

The English general abandoned his ammunition and stores to provide carriages for the wounded Cuesta had left; and that surprising general in-

stantly produced vehicles sufficient to carry off Wellington's jettisoned stores as plunder, though he declared he had none for the service of the brave men who had been wounded in fighting for Spain. "We are worse off," wrote Wellington, "than in a hostile country. Never was an army so ill-used. We were obliged to lay down our ammunition, to unload the treasure, and to employ the cars in the removal of our sick and wounded."

Wellington evaded Soult by an adroit movement. He crossed the Tagus at Arzobispo, marched down the left bank of the river, and seized the bridge at Almaraz, thus interposing the broad stream of the Tagus betwixt himself and the enemy, and barring Soult's advance. With monumental stupidity, Cuesta now wanted to stand and fight while the French armies, in overwhelming numbers, were closing upon them. He had not generalship enough to understand the peril of the crisis: 90,000 French veterans were converging on the allies; Cuesta's troops, it was highly probable, would run at the first shot, and Wellington would thus be left with some 18,000 troops to meet the shock of well-nigh 100,000 veteran soldiers. The fate of the Peninsula hung by a thread. Wellington sternly told Cuesta he might do as he pleased, but the English army would fall back. "That decision," says Napier, "saved the Peninsula. What could Wellington have done with 17,000 starving troops, encumbered with the terror-



stricken Spaniards, against the 70,000 French, that would have stormed their position on three sides at once?"

So the English general fell back on Badajos and Elvas, standing on guard there to defend Portugal, and preparing for the overwhelming forces which he felt sure Napoleon would soon concentrate against him, but leaving the Spanish generals to their own absurd tactics, and Spanish juntas to their own ignoble squabbles. "Until some great change shall be effected in the conduct of the military resources of Spain and in the state of her armies," he wrote, "no British army can attempt safely to co-operate with Spanish troops in the territories of Spain. No alliance can protect her from the results of internal disorders and national infirmity." "If we can maintain ourselves in Portugal," he wrote again, "the war will not cease in the Peninsula; and if the war lasts in the Peninsula, Europe will be saved." And to that task, with iron resolve and luminous, far-reaching sagacity, Wellington devoted himself.

Napoleon, meanwhile, had triumphed once more on the Continent. Wagram had been fought and won. Austria had been struck down, and the Treaty of Vienna gave to the French Emperor a mastery on the Continent more haughty and absolute than ever. The first use Napoleon made of his victory over Austria was to pour new armies into Spain. Once more the passes of the Pyrenees rang to the

tread of disciplined columns and the roll of artillery, as the victors of Wagram poured into Spain, eager, in Napoleon's own phrase, "to drive the terrified leopard into the sea." The new forces included 17,000 of the Imperial Guard. On July 15, 1810, the French armies in the Peninsula had risen to 370,000 men and 80,000 horses. Spain was submerged under a hostile deluge. The Spanish armies had practically ceased to exist. Wellington's scanty forces guarding the Portuguese frontier, scarcely reaching 30,000 men, alone lifted themselves above the devastating flood. It was loudly rumoured that Napoleon was coming in person to complete the conquest of the Peninsula; and had he come, with his imperious will and amazing mastery of the art of war, it is difficult to believe that even Wellington could have stood in his path. The course of history might have been permanently changed.

But Spain was for Napoleon a hateful field of war. He abhorred it. Fighting Spanish armies was like fighting ghosts. They were intangible and unkillable! On the Spanish side it was a campaign of assassinations rather than of battles, "and Napoleon," says Jomini, "hated a population which included so many fanatics." But Napoleon devoted to the conquest of Spain, or rather to the destruction of the English in Spain, his choicest troops and his best general. Massena came to Spain to take up the task in which so many French marshals had failed.

We have Wellington's testimony that Massena had "the best military head of all Napoleon's generals." He was now old, idle, self-indulgent; but he was still, when roused, the victor of Zürich and of Rivoli, stubborn, resourceful, dangerous, with the fighting courage of an angry bear. He had won new fame in the great battles just fought in Germany, and was certainly the greatest master of war, next to Napoleon himself, France possessed.

Napoleon, it is to be observed, held that, by expending such vast armies and employing such famous generals in the conquest of Spain, he was conferring imperishable benefits on that country, and was entitled to award himself some generous compensations. He appropriated, for this purpose, Spain up to the left bank of the Ebro. This huge slice of unhappy Spain, Napoleon explained to the bewildered Joseph, must be annexed to France, "as an indemnity for the money, and for all that Spain has cost me up to this present moment." A procession of massacres and a felonious attack on national freedom were thus, for the first time in history, transfigured into a title for almost weeping gratitude on the part of the nation thus vivisected!

The new French armies in Spain were grouped into three divisions. The army of the south, under Soult, numbered 73,000 men; Massena was chief of the army of Portugal, having under him Regnier, Ney, and Junot, and the cavalry of Montbrun, a



total force of nearly 87,000. Joseph himself commanded the army of the centre, a force of 25,000 men. Drouet's corps, 24,000 strong, stretched from Vittoria to Valladolid, but was destined to aid the operations of Massena, as were the corps of Serras and of Bonnet. Massena thus had 86,000 men under his immediate command, and could draw for reinforcements on 50,000 more. To meet this gigantic force, Wellington had a mixed force of less than 80,000, of which only 25,000 were British.

The huge forces Napoleon thus set in operation in the Peninsula seemed irresistible. But, for one thing, these forces were fatally divided. No French general really trusted another, or was loyally bent on helping him. Joseph was almost as poor as the fabled King of Brentford, and he and Soult found in Andalusia an irresistible temptation. It was the one as yet unplundered province in Spain. Now that Spanish armies had practically vanished, like so much wind-blown chaff, the province seemed to lie defenceless, and it promised almost illimitable booty. Napoleon realised that the Peninsula was unconquered while the English held a single square mile of its soil. "There is nothing dangerous in Spain," he said, "but the English;" and he was too good a soldier not to understand the folly of committing half his armies to what was a mere irrelevant adventure. But the predatory instinct was supreme in Napoleon's own mind, as well as in the imagination of the marshals trained



in his school, and Soult, with 70,000 men, was allowed to march to the south of Spain.

Andalusia proved an easy prey. Seville fell on February 1, almost without a blow, its ridiculous junta flying, with loud, distracted screams, elsewhere. On February 3 Soult wrote with exultation to Berthier, "One might consider the war as almost ended." Only Cadiz remained to be besieged. But an English force had entered Cadiz; English ships swept its shores with their guns, and Cadiz, as a matter of fact, proved impossible of capture. All Spain at that moment, however, seemed in the hands of France. There only remained the sandy peninsula on which Cadiz stands, and which Graham was now holding with soldierly resolution, and the rugged hills betwixt the Tagus and the Atlantic, where Wellington stood on guard.

But the invasion of Andalusia was a strategic blunder which went far to wreck Napoleon's plans. It divided the French strength in Spain. The task of conquering Andalusia was trifling; the business of holding it was stupendous. "Our soldiers," says Lanfrey, "seemed to hold Andalusia; but in reality it was Andalusia which held them." Wellington's quick brain grasped the blunder of his opponents. "The French will soon discover," he wrote, "that they are not strong enough to blockade Cadiz and to attack us in Portugal at the same time."

While Spanish armies practically vanished in this

fashion from the stage, an obstinate, cruel, and almost universal guerilla warfare broke out, which proved of infinite mischief for the French. "Spaniards," Hill wrote, "often fight longer than they are expected to do when they get behind a wall." The typical Spaniard, it may be added, fights longest when he gets behind a bush or a rock. His genius, that is, lends itself to planless partisan warfare. He is patient, hardy, furtive, careless of method, strongly swayed by personal passion; and the same Spaniards who ran like sheep when ranked in battalions, recovered all their valour when they became wandering guerillas. Innumerable bands of partisans arose. They captured the French convoys, intercepted their couriers, slew their stragglers, cut off their detachments, and maintained a wasting and ferocious warfare that cost the French more lives than all the pitched battles fought with Spanish armies. The French system of living by plunder both created the guerillas and gave them their opportunity. Every new village plundered sent a swarm of angry partisans to the hills; and, as the French could only subsist by plunder, their widely scattered detachments gave the guerillas ample opportunity for revenge. It not seldom took a regiment to convoy a despatch from one French general to another. When Massena sent Foy on a special mission to Paris from the lines at Torres Vedras, three infantry battalions had to escort his messenger as far as the Pyrenees.

The most ferocious cruelty was practised by the guerillas on the French, and these were only too eager to pay back their tormentors in kind. Soult, when in Andalusia, issued a proclamation announcing that as no regular Spanish army existed, the war was to be regarded as closed, and all Spaniards found in arms should be shot as mere banditti. The Spanish Regency replied with a counter-decree, declaring that for every Spaniard thus shot three Frenchmen should be hanged, and three more for every house burned. When the authorities on either side were discharging such dreadful decrees at each other, it may be imagined with what ferocity war was carried on by countless bands of self-constituted guerillas. As a result of this partisan warfare, French authority practically ceased outside their own camps.

Massena set his huge columns in motion in the beginning of June. His first task was to seize the two great frontier fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. Ciudad Rodrigo was defended with obstinate courage by its governor, Harrasti, a gallant Spaniard. Wellington watched the siege from the hills of Beira, his outposts being so near the French lines that they could hear the sounds of musketry fire from the walls of the besieged city. The most earnest appeals were made to Wellington for succour. Massena taunted him with abandoning his allies; the British soldiers themselves, watching how gallantly the fortress held out, were almost mutinous in their



eagerness to advance. But Wellington's stern coolness never wavered. Better to lose a fortress than to lose a campaign! He knew that a single disaster, or even a victory too dearly bought, would bring him agitated orders from the English Cabinet to abandon Portugal. After the tragedy of the Walcheren expedition, Ministers could not afford to risk the loss of another army. So Wellington looked on while Ciudad Rodrigo fell, and by doing so he showed himself to be a consummate general.

Marbot gives a picturesque account of the siege from the French side. Ney, he says, had drawn up a column of 1500 volunteers as a storming party, when one of the engineers expressed a fear that the breach was not practicable. Thereupon, he says, "three of our soldiers mounted to the top of it, looked into the town, made such examination as was useful, and fired their muskets, rejoining their comrades without being wounded, although this bold feat was performed in broad daylight." This incident proves miraculously bad shooting on the part of the Spaniards, but the spectacle of that act of cool and desperate valour kindled the 1500 volunteers to flame. They were already sweeping like a torrent up the breach, when the Spanish flag fluttered down. Ciudad Rodrigo had surrendered!



## CHAPTER XV

### THE FIGHT ON THE COA

CRAUFURD, with the Light Division, was on the Coa, watching the French operations, with strict injunctions not to fight beyond that river. Craufurd's task was to encourage the besieged Spaniards, bridle French plundering parties, and collect supplies for the British throughout the very plain on which Ney's forces were encamped. It was a difficult and daring task, but one which exactly suited Craufurd's genius. Both soldiers and general were of the highest fighting quality. The Light Division in warlike fame is worthy to stand beside Cæsar's Tenth Legion or the Old Guard of Napoleon; while Craufurd was of an impatient and heady valour which made him accept, with something like rapture, risks from which a more prudent leader would have shrunk. He had under his command a single British division, consisting of 4000 infantry, 1100 cavalry, and 6 guns. Within two hours' march of him were 60,000 French. Yet Craufurd held to the farther bank of the Coa—the French bank, that is—sent out his pickets with cool audacity towards

the enemy's lines, and played that daring game for three months, standing ready for instant combat, but sternly warned by Wellington to withdraw the moment the French moved. Craufurd, in a word, with a weak division, stood for long months at the bayonet's point, so to speak, of 60,000 French infantry, all hardy and active soldiers, under generals trained in Napoleon's school; and kept his perilous post unharmed. So alert, so vigilant, so audacious was Craufurd's generalship!

The French moved at last. A tempest of rain was scourging the British position as the morning of July 24 broke. The British troops, after the invariable custom of the Peninsula, had been under arms for an hour before daybreak, and the dripping soldiers were about to be dismissed, when the French in solid columns were reported to be advancing. Ney, with 30,000 infantry and cavalry and thirty guns, was coming on, in fact, at speed. The French advance stirred Craufurd's fighting blood. He could not bring himself to cross the river without a conflict: and instead of promptly retiring, sent forward his cavalry and guns. The odds were overwhelming against the English, and the position unfavourable in the highest degree for them. They had, in retreating, to descend from the crest of a ravine—a crest which might be instantly occupied by thirty French guns—and to cross the Coa by a single narrow bridge. Craufurd's position was a mile in advance of



GENERAL CRAUFURD

*From a drawing in the possession of* LIEUT.-COLONEL R. HOLDEN





the bridge, and he held that perilous and absurd post in front of the advancing enemy for two hours, till, when he did fall back, he had to pass the defile in all the confusion of a retreat, and pressed by an eager enemy five times as strong as himself.

The French came on with loud beating of drums and shrill clamour of voices. The converging columns quickened to a run as they saw the scanty British force before them; 4000 horsemen were sweeping up; white puffs of smoke shot thick and fast from the advancing guns. Ordinary troops caught in such a trap might well have broken, and a moment's failure in steadiness would have been for the English destruction. But the men of the Light Division were not ordinary troops. Craufurd's scanty cavalry met the advancing French with resolute charges, while the great body of French cavalry under Montbrun, who was not under Ney's orders, hung back, though Ney sent five officers in succession urging them to charge. Etiquette for Montbrun was more than victory!

Simmons describes the French as "coming on again and again with drums beating, French officers, like mountebanks, running forward, placing their hats on their swords, capering about like madmen, and crying 'Come on, children of our country! The first that advances Napoleon will reward him.' But nothing shook the order, or the obstinate courage, of the slowly retiring British." A body of hussars in bearskin caps

and light-coloured pelisses got amongst a broken group of Rifles, says Simmons, and began to sabre them; but the stubborn Rifles fought man to man, meeting the horsemen's sabres with their bayonets.

The Light Division fell back with dogged steadiness through nearly a mile of broken country, seamed with ravines and tangled with vineyards, before they reached the bridge. Nothing could surpass the cool soldiership of the British. They held each point of vantage stubbornly, checked the too vehement French with stern counter-charges, filed with adroit speed over the bridge, and instantly lined the farther bank to cover the passage with their fire. To gain time for the last files to cross, M'Leod of the 43rd, waving his cap, and calling on his men to follow, rode straight at the foremost French column; his soldiers, not waiting to form up, ran, an angry cluster, with threatening bayonets, at their officer's call. The French halted in doubt at that disquieting spectacle, and before they could advance again, the last British were across the bridge!

William Napier gives us a pen-picture of Craufurd during this stage of the fight. Napier was holding the road with desperate valour to cover the passage of the broken troops over the narrow bridge. His force consisted of some 300 men of various regiments, whom he had collected. "He (Craufurd) came upon me upon the road," says Napier, "and seemed overwhelmed with anguish at his own rashness in fight-

ing on that side of the river. I have always thought he was going to ride in amongst the enemy, who were close to us, but finding me with a considerable body of men in hand whom he had given up for lost, he changed his design. He was very wild in his appearance and manner." Napier's company alone lost in this bitter fight nearly half its number in killed and wounded. Craufurd, it must be remembered, had suffered the most shameful experiences a soldier can know under Whitelocke at Buenos Ayres. He had seen a fine army destroyed, a great enterprise wrecked, and the military honour of his country stained, by mere failure of fighting impulse in the general. That memory stung Craufurd's fiery nature to yet new fervours of daring. It predisposed him to fight always, on all occasions, and against all odds. Craufurd might not have shown such rash audacity on the Coa in 1810 if he had not witnessed, and suffered from, Whitelocke's helpless cowardice at Buenos Ayres in 1807.

Craufurd's six guns were now barking angrily across the river, from the farther bank, at the French as they came on at the quick-step to carry the bridge. An officer in a brilliant uniform led them, a drummer beating the *pas de charge* at his side. But so fierce and swift was the fire of English muskets and artillery, that no living man could cross the bridge. Rush after rush was made, and the pile of slain on the bridge rose till it was level with the parapet.



The French are adroit soldiers. They could not come to the river's edge without coming under the fire of the British Rifles on the opposite bank; "but some of them," Simmons records, "held up calabashes as if to say, 'Let us get some water to drink.' They were allowed to come down to the bank, when they instantly dropped flat amongst the rocks on its edge, and opened a deadly fire across the stream." George Napier of the 52nd was holding part of the river-bank against the French, and he describes another incident of the fight. "Where I was," he says, "the French only came half-way down to the bank of the river from the opposite height, and then a fine dashing fellow, a French staff officer, rode down just opposite my position to try if the river was fordable at that part. Not liking to fire at a single man, I called out to him, and made signs that he must go back; but he would not, and being determined to try it, he dashed fearlessly into the water. It was then necessary to fire at him, and instantly both man and horse fell dead, and their corpses floated down the stream!"

It is both asserted and denied that Picton refused to advance to Craufurd's help on the day of the combat of the Coa; but the evidence of Campbell, Craufurd's brigade-major, seems decisive. Campbell was present at the interview betwixt the two generals, both of them fine soldiers, and both too self-willed and fiery to make co-operation easy. "Slight was



the converse," says Campbell, "short the interview, but it was hot as short. Craufurd asked Picton if he did not consider it advisable to move out something from Pinhel to support the Light Division; and in terms not bland, Picton declared he would do no such thing; and with high looks and fierce words the two British generals parted."

General le Marchant draws a vivid picture of these two equally gallant but strangely contrasted soldiers. "Picton," he says, "when wrapped in his military cloak, might have been mistaken for a bronze statue of Cato; so staid was he, so deliberate and austere. Craufurd, of a diminutive and not imposing figure, was characterised by a vivacity almost mercurial both in thought and act; his eager spirit and fertile brain ever hurrying him into difficulty and danger. Craufurd had the faults natural to a hasty temper, Picton those belonging to a morose nature. With all his faults, Craufurd was unquestionably the finest commander of light troops the Peninsular War produced."

Napier says that it was the fine training which Moore had impressed on the Light Division which enabled them to evade Massena's stroke on the banks of the Coa. Their matchless discipline was their protection. "A phantom hero from Corunna saved them." But that is scarcely fair to Craufurd. He was an unrivalled master in outpost warfare; and, to quote Kincaid—a quite competent authority—"To

Craufurd belonged the chief merit of making the Light Division the incomparable fighting instrument it became."

Craufurd held the bridge till night, and then fell back in the darkness with a loss of nearly 300 killed and wounded. But of the French a thousand had fallen. Craufurd's own summary of the day's operations is expressive. "A corps of 4000 men," he says, "remained during the whole day in the presence of an army amounting to 24,000, performed in the presence of so superior a force one of the most difficult operations of war, a retreat from a very broken and extensive position over one narrow defile . . . and in the course of the affair this corps of 4000 men inflicted upon this army of 24,000 a loss equal to double of that which it sustained."

Almeida, which should have held out for weeks, fell by an accident in four days. On August 27, when the trenches had been only open three days, the great magazine and the fortress were blown up by mischance. Night was falling on the town; the fire of the guns had ceased. Suddenly a deep sustained blast of sound rose in the darkening sky and swept over the landscape. The great castle crumbled like a pack of cards. A column of smoke and fire shot up into the air; 500 of the garrison were slain almost at a breath, and with such completeness was the town destroyed, that only six houses were left standing.

The frontier fortresses had thus fallen with un-

expected haste, and Massena as he crossed the border issued a sonorous and very French proclamation. He called on the Portuguese to turn their arms against the English who had supplied them. "The English," he declared, "were their only enemies." Resistance was vain. "Can the feeble armies of the British general," asked Massena, "expect to oppose the victorious legions of the Emperor?" The trembling Portuguese were exhorted to "snatch the moment that mercy and generosity offered."

Napoleon himself shared Massena's confidence. "Wellington," he wrote, "has only 18,000 men; Hill has only 6000. It would be ridiculous to suppose that 25,000 English can balance 60,000 French, if the latter do not trifle, but fall boldly on." Massena, it must be confessed, did in a sense "trifle." He lingered for two months after Ciudad Rodrigo had fallen. He was old; he was in an idle mood; he was amusing himself with a mistress when he should have been pushing on his battalions with breathless speed.

Wellington, meanwhile, had framed his plans for the defence of Portugal with the sagacity of a statesman and the warlike skill of a great captain. Since Portugal was to be the battle-ground against Napoleon, and all its resources were to be employed in the strife, he urged that England must sustain the public finances of the country. A subsidy of £300,000 a year was granted towards the civil expenses of Portugal, another of £150,000 to enable



the Portuguese Regency to adequately pay its officers, bringing up the total English subsidies to more than £1,000,000 per annum. The different financial methods of the opposing armies illustrate their separate ideals. The English, with a force of only 30,000 men in the Peninsula, expended £376,000 monthly in maintaining the campaign. Napoleon, with more than 350,000 troops in the Peninsula, limited the charges on their account on the French Treasury to £80,000 per month. England, that is, spent in the Peninsula £11 per month for every soldier under her flag there. Napoleon, for the same purpose, spent only four shillings per man. Spanish or Portuguese pockets—as far as the French were concerned—had to supply the balance.

Wellington accepted the office of Marshal-General of Portugal, and practically took the whole civil and military administration of the country into his own hands. The ancient military law, which made the whole able-bodied population liable to military service, was revived. Beresford had by this time created a Portuguese army with British discipline and British officers; and that curious genius for the leadership of other races which has made British rule in India—and, indeed, the whole modern British empire—possible, had already transformed the shambling inert Portuguese private into a soldier not unfit to meet even French veterans in battle.



## CHAPTER XVI

### BUSACO

THE strategy on which Wellington depended for baffling the French rush on Portugal may be told almost in a sentence. He had created a great natural fortress—the far-famed lines of Torres Vedras—which could be held against the utmost strength of France. He would fall back on this, wasting the country as he went, so that Massena would find himself stopped by an impregnable barrier, and in the midst of a wilderness where his great army must starve. Meanwhile, on the rear and along the communications of the enemy a tireless guerilla warfare would be kindled. Massena, under these conditions, must either retreat or perish.

It was a great scheme, planned and executed with the highest genius. As a matter of fact, within the sweep of Wellington's great hill-fortress the liberty of Europe found its last shelter. And the moment when Massena fell sullenly back from the lines of Torres Vedras marks the decisive and fatal turn of the tide in Napoleon's fortunes.

But Wellington's designs were little understood.

either in England or by his own forces; and, at the very moment when he had shaped this great and triumphant strategy, destined to achieve such memorable results, he was the subject everywhere of the despairing doubts of his friends, as well as the loud-tongued criticisms of his enemies. "It is probable," Lord Liverpool himself said, "the army will embark in September." "Your chances of successful defence," he wrote to Wellington in March 1810, "are considered here by all persons, military as well as civil, so improbable, that I could not recommend any attempt at what may be called desperate resistance." Wellington's own officers wrought great mischief by their indiscreetly uttered doubts. Wellington complained of this with a vigour which has all the effect of wit. "As soon as an accident happens," he said, "every man who can write, and who has a friend who can read, sits down to give his account of what he does not know, and his comments on what he does not understand; and these are diligently circulated and exaggerated by the idle and malicious, of whom there are plenty in all armies."

When Wellington's friends in the English Cabinet, and the members of his own staff in Portugal, were of this temper, it may be imagined how loud and angry were the criticisms expended on the unfortunate general by his political enemies everywhere. The Opposition in the House of Commons moved for an inquiry into the conduct of the campaign. The

Common Council of London, mistaking themselves for a body of military experts, solemnly accused Wellington, in an address to the King, of "ignorance," of "an incapacity for profiting by the lessons of experience," and of having exhibited in the Talavera campaign, "with equal rashness and ostentation, nothing but a useless valour." The spectacle of a group of London aldermen, newly charged with turtle-soup, rebuking the military "ignorance" of Wellington still has an exquisite relish of pure humour. One orator in Parliament declared it to be "melancholy and alarming" that Wellington should have "the impertinence to think of defending Portugal with 50,000 men, of whom only 20,000 were English. The only British soldiers left in the Peninsula before six months were over," this writer added, "would be prisoners of war"—a singularly bad prophecy!

The attacks of English newspapers and the criticisms of English orators did not shake Wellington's steadfast temper, but they curiously deceived Napoleon. He was persuaded that he read the mind of England in the leading articles of the Opposition papers. He reprinted most of them, indeed, in the *Moniteur* for the consolation of French readers; and his belief that the English Cabinet must soon withdraw Wellington or itself be overthrown, made him regard the Spanish war as a trivial thing which could be safely neglected. So he left that conflagra-

tion unextinguished. He undertook the struggle with Russia while Spain was still unconquered, and thus made that fatal division in his forces which ultimately ruined him. The writers and orators attacking Wellington at this stage of the conflict did not in the least intend it, but, as a matter of fact, they rendered his plans a great service. They helped to keep Napoleon from coming himself to Spain !

On September 15 Massena set his huge columns in movement, and began what he fondly hoped was his march to Lisbon. His troops carried seventeen days' rations ; communications with Spain were abandoned, and Massena believed that within those days the campaign would be over.

Never was a more mistaken calculation ! Massena blundered at the outset in his choice of road, taking that along the right bank of the Mondego to Coimbra, fretted with every kind of difficulty. His Portuguese advisers had misled him. "There are certainly," said Wellington, "many bad roads in Portugal, but the enemy has taken decidedly the worst in the whole kingdom." And into that worst of all Portuguese roads Massena poured cavalry, infantry, artillery, and baggage, in one vast and confused mass. Wellington fell steadily back, wasting the country as he went, and compelling the entire population to fall back with him. The clamour and discontent thus kindled may be guessed. Wellington's cool purpose was unshaken ; but to steady the courage of the



wavering, abate the too eager spirits of the French, and satisfy the temper of his own troops, growing angrily impatient of retreat, Wellington turned at bay at Busaco, and fought what was really a political battle.

Busaco is a wild and lofty ridge, stretching for a distance of eight miles across the valley of the Mondego, and thus barring Massena's advance. With its sullen gorges, its cloven crest, the deep, narrow valley running along its front—a sort of natural ditch, so narrow that a cannon-shot spanned it, so deep and gloomy that the eye could not pierce its depths—Busaco was an ideal position for defence. "If Massena attacks me here," said Wellington, "I shall beat him." The single defect of the position was its great size. Some portion of its rocky face or of its tree-clad heights must be left uncovered. The French van, indeed, came in sight of Busaco, and saw its ridge sparkling with bayonets, before the British were all in position, and Ney was keen for instant onfall. But Massena was loitering ten miles in the rear; no attack could be made till he came up, and the opportunity was lost.

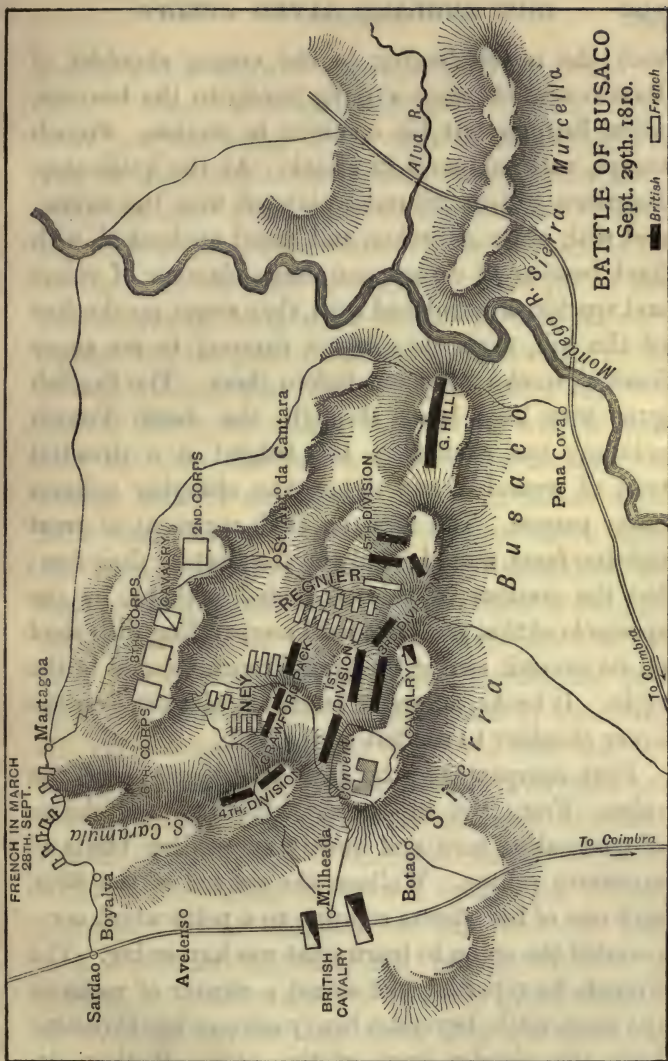
On September 27, the British troops watched from the steep ridge of Busaco the great French host coming on. It seemed like the march of a Persian army or the migration of a people. The roads, the valleys, the mountain slopes, the open forest intervals, glittered with steel, and were crowded, not merely with guns and battalions, but with flocks and waggons;

while over the whole moving landscape slowly rose a drifting continent of dust. Says Leith Hay: "In imposing appearance as to numerical strength, I have never seen anything comparable to that of the enemy's army from Busaco. It was not alone an army encamped before us, but a multitude. Cavalry, infantry, artillery, cars of the country, horses, tribes of mules with their attendants, sutlers, followers of every description, crowded the moving scene upon which Wellington and his army looked down." It was nightfall before the human flood reached the point where the stern heights of Busaco arrested its flow. Then, in the darkness, innumerable camp-fires gleamed, and the two great armies slept.

It is always difficult to crystallise into lucid sentences the incidents of a great battle, and Busaco, if only by reason of the wide space of rugged and broken ground on which it was fought, easily lends itself to mistake. But the chief features of the battle are clear. Ney, with three divisions, was to attack the English left, held by Craufurd and the Light Division; Regnier, with two columns, was to fall on the English right, guarded by Picton and the third division—"the Fighting Third." The two points of attack were three miles apart.

Regnier's troops were a real *corps d'élite*, and included the 36th, a regiment specially honoured by Napoleon. It was still grey dawn, cold and bitter,

FRENCH IN MARCH  
28TH. SEPT.



# BATTLE OF BUSACO Sept. 29th. 1810.

■ British □ French

Walker & Boutwell



with the mists clinging to the craggy shoulder of Busaco, and the stars shining faintly in the heavens, when Regnier put his columns in motion. French troops, well led, excel in attack. At the quick-step, Regnier's gallant columns plunged into the ravine, and with order unbroken and speed unchecked, with loud beating of drums and fierce clamour of voices and sparkle of burnished steel, they swept up the face of the hill, their skirmishers running in an angry foam of smoke and flame before them. The English guns tore long lanes through the dense French column; but though it left behind it a dreadful trail of wounded and dying, the charging column never paused. The 88th, an Irish regiment of great fighting fame, waited grimly on the crest for their foes; but the contour of the hill, aided, perhaps, by the spectacle of that steadfast red line sparkling with steel on its summit, swung the great French column to the right. It broke, an angry human tidal wave, over the lower shoulder to the left of the 88th.

Four companies of the 45th held that part of the ridge. From the dip in the hill came the shouts of contending men and swiftly succeeding blasts of musketry volleys. Wallace, the colonel of the 88th, sent one of his officers running to a point which commanded the scene to learn what was happening. The French, he reported, had seized a cluster of rocks on the crest, while, beyond, a heavy column was thrusting back the slender lines of the 45th. Wallace de-



livered a brief address in soldierly vernacular to his men. "Now, Connaught Rangers," he said, "mind what you are going to do; and when I bring you face to face with those French rascals, drive them down the hill. Push home to the muzzle!" Then, throwing his men into column, he took them at the double along the crest of the hill. The 45th, at that moment, was pouring quick and rolling volleys on the French, but the great column came on without pause. It was evident that in another moment the thin line of the 45th would be broken, and Wallace took his men into the fight at a run, striking the French column on its shoulder. An officer of the 88th describes the scene: "Wallace threw himself from his horse, and placing himself at the head of the 45th and 88th, with Gwynne of the 45th on the one side of him, and Captain Seton of the 88th at the other, ran forward at a charging pace into the midst of the terrible flame in his front. All was now confusion and uproar, smoke, fire, and bullets; officers and soldiers, French drummers and French drums knocked down in every direction; British, French, and Portuguese mixed together; while in the midst of all was to be seen Wallace fighting—like his ancestor of old!—at the head of his devoted followers, and calling out to his soldiers to 'press forward!' It was a proud moment for Wallace and Gwynne when they saw their gallant comrades breaking down and trampling under

their feet this splendid French division, composed of some of the best troops the world could boast of. The leading regiment, the 36th, one of Napoleon's favourite battalions, was nearly destroyed; upwards of 200 soldiers and their old colonel, covered with orders, lay dead in a small space, and the face of the hill was strewn with dead and wounded."

Wallace, with fine soldiership, halted his men on the slope of the hill; and as he dressed his line, Wellington rode up and told the panting colonel of the 88th that he "had never seen a more gallant charge." Wellington, with Beresford by his side, had seen, from an eminence near, the 88th running forward in their charge, a regiment attacking a column, and Beresford had expressed some uneasiness as to the result. Wellington was silent; but when Regnier's division went reeling down the hill, wrecked by the furious onfall of the 88th, he tapped Beresford on the shoulder and said, "Well, Beresford, look at them now!" Marbot says of the 88th that their first volley, delivered at fifteen paces, stretched more than 500 men on the ground.

At one point on the British right the French for a moment succeeded. The light companies of the 74th and the 88th were thrust back by Regnier's second column. Picton rallied the broken lines within sixty yards of the eagerly advancing French, and led them forward in a resolute charge, which thrust the French column down the slope; and, to quote

a French account of their own experiences, "they found themselves driven in a heap down the steep descent up which they had climbed. The English lines followed them half-way down, firing volleys—to which our own men could not reply—and murderous they were."

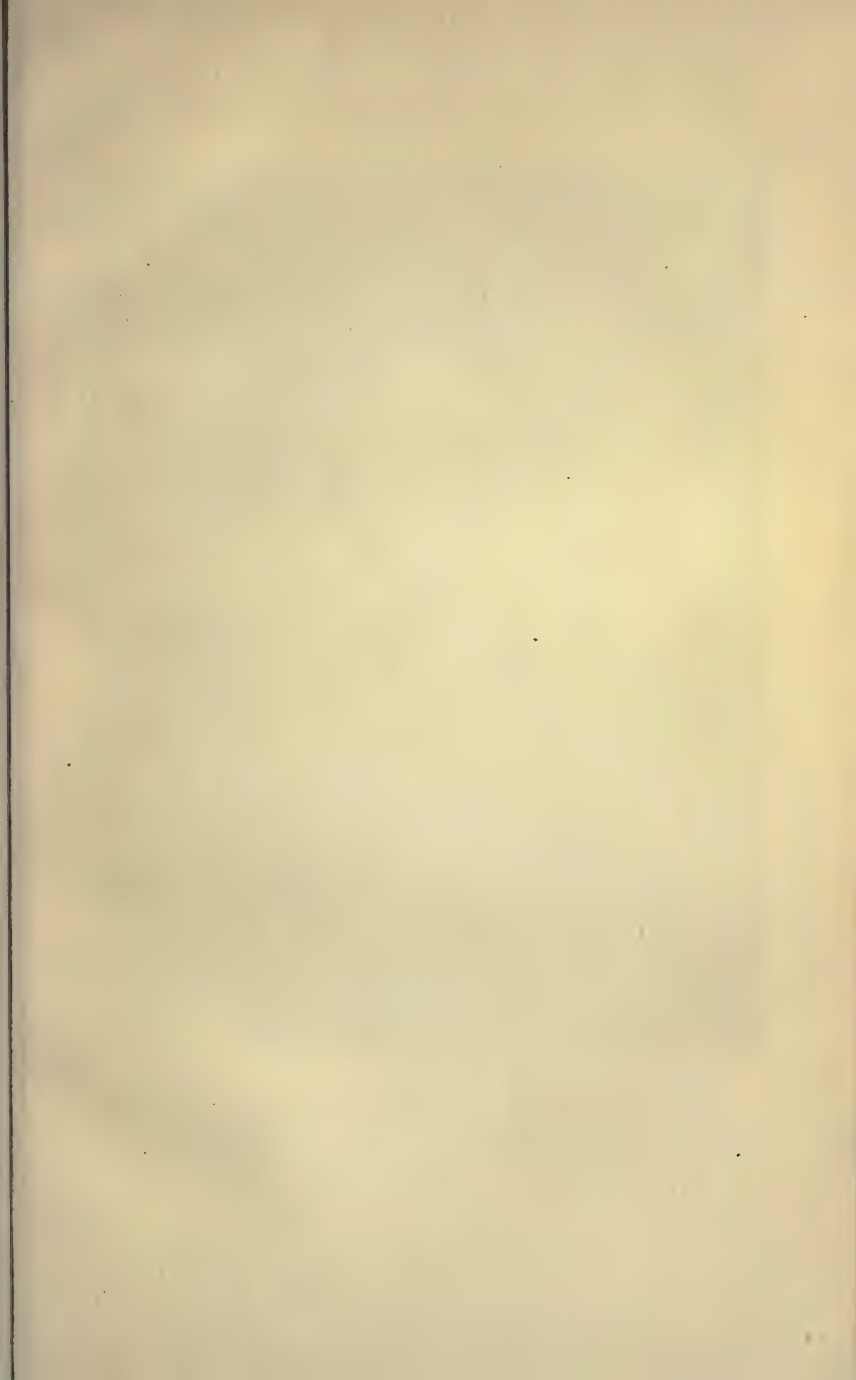
Ney led the attack on the British left. Three huge columns broke out of the gloomy ravine and came swiftly up the steep face of the hill. From the crest above jets of flame and smoke shot out as the English guns opened on the advancing French. A fringe of pointed musketry flames sparkled along a wide stretch of the hill below the guns, where the Rifles were thrown out in skirmishing order. But the rest of the hill above seemed empty, and the French came on with all the fire of victory in their blood. Neither the red flame of the artillery nor the venomous rifle-fire of the skirmishers could stay them. But on the reverse slope Craufurd held the 43rd and 52nd drawn up in line ready for a great and surprising counter-stroke. On came the French columns. The flourished swords of the officers, the tall bearskin hats and sparkling bayonets of the leading files, were visible over the ridge. The skirmishers of the Rifles had been brushed aside like dust. The French were already over the summit, a soldierly figure leading and vehemently calling them on. It was General Simon, and an English rifleman, falling back with fierce reluctance, suddenly turned



and shot the unfortunate French general in the face, shattering it out of human resemblance.

At that moment Craufurd sent forward his two regiments, in a resolute counter-charge. Tradition has it, indeed, that Craufurd did not "send" the regiments forward; his fighting blood was kindled to flame, and he ran in advance of them toward the charging French, flourishing his sword and shouting to them, as if by way of taunt, "Avancez! avancez!" Column and line for a moment seemed to meet. Each man in the leading section of the French raised his musket and fired point-blank into the human wall coming forward at the double. A sudden gap in this moving red wall was for an instant visible, and two officers and ten men fell. Not a shot from a French musket had missed! Then the long British line broke into a rending volley. Thrice, at a distance of not more than five yards, that dreadful blast of sound, with its accompanying tempest of flying lead, broke on the staggering French column. The human mass, in all its pride of glittering military array, seemed to shrivel under those fierce-darting points of flame. In tumult and dust, a broken mass, with arms abandoned, ranks torn asunder, and discipline forgotten, the unhappy column rolled down the steep face of Busaco, strewing its rocks with the dead and the dying. One of the Napiers—afterwards the conqueror of Scinde—shared in that fight, and fell in it, shot cruelly







SIR WILLIAM NAPIER

*From an engraving (after a miniature) in the Life of SIR WILLIAM NAPIER,  
edited by H. A. BRUCE, M.P. By permission of MR. JOHN MURRAY*

through the face. "I could not die better," he gasped as the blood ran from his shattered mouth, "than at such a moment."

George Napier gives a realistic sketch of the manner in which Ney's column was met and broken. "We were retired," he says, "a few yards from the brow of the hill, so that our line was concealed from the view of the enemy as they advanced up the heights, and our skirmishers fell back, keeping up a constant and well-directed running fire upon them; and the brigade of horse-artillery under Captain Hugh Ross threw such a heavy fire of shrapnel shells, and so quick, that their column, which consisted of about 8000 men, was put into a good deal of confusion, and lost great numbers before it arrived at a ledge of ground just under the brow of the hill, where they halted a few moments to take breath, the head of the column being exactly fronting my company, which was the right company of our brigade, and joining the left company of the 43rd, where my brother William was with his company. General Craufurd himself stood on the brow of the hill watching every movement of the attacking column, and when all our skirmishers had passed by and joined their respective corps, and the head of the enemy's column was within a very few yards of him, he turned round, came up to the 52nd, and called out, 'Now, 52nd, revenge the death of Sir John Moore! Charge! charge! huzza!' and waving his

hat in the air, he was answered by a shout that appalled the enemy, and in one instant the brow of the hill bristled with 2000 British bayonets. My company met the head of the French column, and immediately calling to my men to form column of sections, in order to give more force to our rush, we dashed forward; and as I was by this movement in front of my men a yard or two, a French soldier made a plunge at me with his bayonet, and at the same time his musket going off, I received the contents just under my hip and fell."

The struggle, Napier adds, occupied about twenty minutes; in that brief space of time this huge French column was driven from the top to the bottom of the mountain like a parcel of sheep. "I really did not think it possible," he says, "for such a column to be so completely destroyed in a few minutes as that was. When we got to the bottom, where a small stream ran between us and the enemy's position, by general consent we all mingled together searching for the wounded. During this cessation of fighting we spoke to each other as though we were the greatest friends, and without the least animosity or angry feeling."

The killed and wounded amongst Wellington's forces at Busaco amounted to 1200; but of the enemy 6000 fell. Massena before the battle said, "I cannot persuade myself that Lord Wellington will risk the loss of a reputation by giving battle;



but if he does I have him. To-morrow we shall effect the conquest of Portugal, and in a few days I shall drown the leopard." French generals, from Napoleon downwards, it is to be noted, were always going to "drown" or otherwise slay or put to flight the "Leopard." That mythical animal, however, as we have seen, had a surprising habit of surviving!

Marbot, with a frankness unusual in French literature, says of Busaco "it was one of the most terrible reverses which the French army ever suffered." In a sense the military results of Busaco are not great, but its moral effect was of the utmost importance. It proved the steadiness of the Portuguese soldier under British leadership. It showed that though Wellington, as a matter of strategy, was in retreat, he was strong enough to meet the French in frank battle and beat them, and Busaco gave a new and exultant confidence to public opinion, both in England and Portugal. Wellington himself summed up the result by saying, "It has removed an impression which began to be very general, that we intended to fight no more, but to retire to our ships; it has given the Portuguese a taste for an amusement to which they were not before accustomed, and which they would not have acquired if I had not put them in a very strong position."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LINES OF TORRES VEDRAS

ON the night which followed the battle, the British looked down from the heights they had so valiantly kept on their foemen's camp. The whole country beneath them glowed with countless fires, showing thousands of shadowy forms of men and horses, mingled with piles of arms glittering amidst the flames. There seemed all the promise of a yet more bloody struggle on the following day. Massena, indeed, at first meditated falling back on Spain, and, as events turned out, it would have been a happy stroke of generalship had he done so. All through the 28th he feigned to be making preparations for a new assault on the hill. Already, however, his cavalry were being pushed along a mountain path past the British left, and his infantry columns quickly followed. Massena was turning Wellington's flank, and bent on reaching Coimbra before him.

Wellington, out-marching his opponent, reached Coimbra first, and thence fell back towards Torres Vedras, pushing before him an immense multitude of

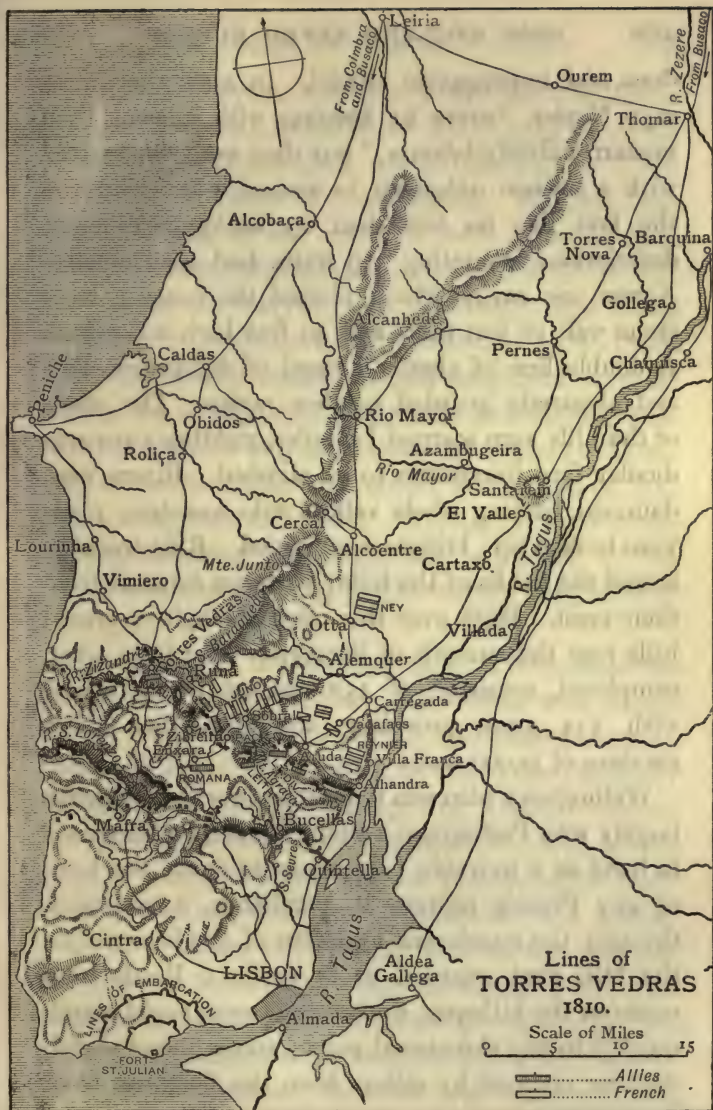
the inhabitants of the district. He meant to leave nothing behind him but a desert. The French reached Coimbra on October 1, with the provisions intended to last them till they reached Lisbon already exhausted. On October 4 Massena renewed his pursuit of Wellington. Then Trant, commanding an independent force of Portuguese, performed what Napier calls "the most daring and hardy enterprise executed by any partisan during the whole war." He leaped upon Coimbra the third day after Massena had left it, captured the Frenchman's depots and hospitals, and took nearly 5000 prisoners, wounded and unwounded, amongst them a marine company of the Imperial Guards. And while Massena's tail, so to speak, was thus being roughly trampled on, his leading columns came in sight of the armed and frowning hills of Torres Vedras, an impregnable barrier behind which Wellington's army had vanished. Massena had not so much as heard of the existence of these famous lines until within two days' march of them!

The keen forecasting intellect of Wellington had planned these great defences more than a year before. A memorandum addressed to Colonel Fletcher, his chief engineer officer, dated October 20, 1809—almost exactly a year to a day before these great defences brought Massena's columns to a halt—gave minute orders for the construction of the lines. But the conception must have taken shape in Wellington's brain long before that date.

Lisbon stands at the tip of a long peninsula formed by the Atlantic on one flank and the Tagus, there a navigable river, on the other. Across this peninsula two successive lines of rugged hills—the farthest only 27 miles from Lisbon—stretch from the sea to the river. Wellington turned these into concentric lines of defence; with a third on the very tip of the peninsula, and intended to cover the actual embarkation of the British forces, if they were driven to that step. The outer line of the defence, a broken irregular curve of hills 29 miles in length, stretches from Alhandra on the Tagus to the mouth of the river Zizandre on the coast. The second line, some eight miles to the rear of the first, is 24 miles long, and reaches from Quintella on the Tagus to where the St. Lorenzo flows into the Atlantic. These hills are pierced only by narrow ravines, and, with their tangled defiles and crescent-like formation, lent themselves readily to defensive works. The second line in Wellington's original plan was that which he intended to hold, the first line was merely to break the impact of Massena's rush. But under the incessant toil of the English engineers the defences of even the outer line became so formidable that Wellington determined to hold it, having the second line to fall back upon if necessary.

The lines of Torres Vedras were probably the most formidable known in the history of war. Two ranges of mountains were, in a word, wrought into a stupen-





dous and impregnable citadel. In scale they were, says Napier, "more in keeping with ancient than modern military labours;" but they were constructed with a science unknown to ancient war. Thus on the first line no less than 69 works of different descriptions, mounting 319 guns, had been erected. Across one ravine which pierced the range a loose stone wall 16 feet thick and 40 feet high was raised. A double line of abattis formed of full-grown oaks and chestnuts guarded another ravine. The crests of the hills were scarped for miles, yielding a perpendicular face impossible to be climbed. Rivers were dammed, turning whole valleys into marshes; roads were broken up; bridges were mined. Rifle-trenches scored the flanks of the hills; batteries frowned from their crest. High over this mighty tangle of armed hills rose the summit of Soccorra. The lines, when completed, consisted of 152 distinct works, armed with 534 guns, providing accommodation for a garrison of 34,000 men.

Wellington's plan was to man the works themselves largely with Portuguese, keeping his English divisions in hand as a movable force, so as to crush the head of any French column if, perchance, it struggled through the murderous cross-fire of the batteries on the hills that guarded every ravine. Roads were made on the hill-crest, so that the troops could march quickly to any threatened point; and a line of signal-stations, manned by sailors from the fleet, ran from

hilltop to hilltop, so that a message could be transmitted from the Atlantic to the Tagus in seven minutes. For more than a year these great works had been in course of construction. No less than 7000 peasants at one moment were at work upon them. The English engineers showed magnificent skill and energy in carrying out the design, and many soldiers who had technical knowledge were drawn from the British regiments and employed as overseers. So solidly were the works constructed, that many of them to-day, more than eighty years after the tide of battle broke and ebbed at their base, still stand, sharp-cut and solid. Wellington thus wrote in long-enduring characters the signature of his strong will and soldierly genius on the very hills of Portugal.

The scale and the scientific skill of these lines are perhaps less wonderful than the secrecy with which they were constructed. British newspapers were as indiscreet and British gossip as active then as now; French spies were as enterprising. And it seems incredible that works which turned a hundred square miles of hills into a vast natural fortress could have been carried out with the noiselessness of a dream, and with a secrecy as of magic. But the fact remains, that not till Massena had reached Coimbra and was committed beyond recall to the march on Lisbon, did he learn the existence of the great barrier that made that march hopeless. Massena had trusted to the



Portuguese officers on his staff for information as to the country he had to cross; but as they had accepted service under the French eagles, they naturally had never visited the district held by the British, and knew nothing of what the British were doing. When he turned fiercely upon his Portuguese officers, they urged this in self-excuse. But they had failed to warn Massena of the existence of the hills themselves. "Yes, yes," said the angry French general. "Wellington built the works; but he did not make the mountains."

Massena spent three days in examining the front of Wellington's defences, and decided that a direct attack, with his present forces, was hopeless. But his stubborn, bear-like courage was roused, and he resolved to hold to his position in front of Wellington till reinforcements reached him. It became a contest of endurance betwixt the two armies, a contest in which all the advantages were on the side of the British. Their rear was open to the sea; ample supplies flowed into their camps. The health of the men was good, their spirits high. They looked down from their hill-fortress and saw their foe waging a sullen warfare with mere starvation. For six desperate and suffering weeks Massena stood before Wellington's lines. The French had raised plunder to a fine art; they could exist where other armies would starve. And Massena's savage and stubborn genius shone in such a position as that in which he now



stood. He kept his men sternly in hand, maintained sleepless watch against the British, and sent out his foraging parties in ever greater scale and with ever wider sweep. To maintain thus, for six hungry and heroic weeks, 60,000 men and 20,000 horses in a country where a British brigade would have perished from mere famine in as many days, was a great feat. Massena's secret lay in diligent, widespread, and microscopic plunder—plunder raised to the dignity of a science, and practised with the skill of one of the fine arts; and Massena added the ruthlessness of an inquisitor to the skill of a great artist in robbery. "All the military arrangements are useless," wrote Wellington, "if the French can find subsistence on the ground which they occupy." And Massena very nearly spoiled Wellington's plans by the endurance with which, in spite of famine and sickness, he held on to his position in front of the lines of Torres Vedras.

The long weeks of endurance were, of course, marked by perpetual conflicts betwixt the foraging parties and pickets of the two armies. A curiously interesting picture of this personal warfare is given in Tomkinson's "Diary of a Cavalry Officer." The British cavalry patrols carried on a sort of predatory warfare with the enemy's parties on their own account. They looked on them as game to be hunted and captured; and the British private went into the business with characteristic relish, and performed really surprising

feats. A sergeant and a couple of dragoons would bring in a "bag" of a score of French infantry with great pride. On the other hand, there was a constant stream of desertions on both sides of the lines. That the French stole to the lines where they knew that at least food awaited them was not strange; but the British desertions were almost as numerous and much more mysterious.

Wellington himself was puzzled by it. "The British soldiers," he wrote to Lord Bathurst, "see the deserters from the enemy coming into their lines daily, all with the story of the unparalleled distresses which their army were suffering, and with the loss of all hope of success in their enterprise. They know at the same time that there is not an article of food or clothing which they need which is not provided for them; and that they have every prospect of success; yet they desert!" In the French camp there was neither food nor hope; within the British lines there were both. Yet every night the astonished British officers had to report desertions. "The deserters," Wellington adds, "are principally Irishmen;" but they were not all Irishmen. The truth is, the average British private hates inaction. He is hungry for incident and movement. He found weeks spent in camp monotonous, and he deserted by way of variety.

The logic of starvation proved at last too strong for even Massena's stubborn courage, and on Novem-

ber 15 he fell back reluctantly to Santarem, having lost more than 6000 men, principally by starvation, in front of Torres Vedras. Wellington pushed out cautiously in pursuit, but at Santarem Massena turned grimly round on his pursuers. He now held a strong position with supplies in his rear; and by holding Santarem he still seemed to threaten Lisbon, and so put a mask over the face of his own defeat. Wellington, on the other side, was not disposed to engage in active operations. The winter was bitter, the rivers flooded, the roads impassable. And so the memorable campaign of 1810 came to an end with two great armies confronting each other, but neither willing to strike. But all the honours and the substantial results of the campaign were with Wellington. Napoleon's confident strategy had gone to wreck on the lines of Torres Vedras.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MASSENA'S FAILURE

MASSENA, as we have seen, held on to his position at Santarem till March 5, 1811—for four dogged, much-enduring months, that is; a prodigy of endurance. Foy meanwhile was sent to explain the situation to Napoleon in person, a moderate-sized division being necessary to convoy him safely across Spain to the Pyrenees. Napoleon's pride was stung by the Spanish disasters, and his masterful genius quickly framed a new and yet more spacious strategy for his generals. Bessières, with 12,000 of the Imperial Guard, entered Spain; Drouet, with 10,000 men, marched to join Massena; Soult was instructed to abandon the siege of Cadiz, and, with his whole available force, march to join hands with Massena. This would give that general a force of 70,000 men, sufficient, it was hoped, to overwhelm Wellington.

Soult was the most dangerous element in this combination, and Wellington planted Hill at Abrantes to bar his junction with Massena. But Napoleon's new combination, like all previous plans, was at first post-





MARSHAL ANDRÉ MASSENA

*From an engraving after the painting by BONNE-MAISON*



poned, and finally wrecked, by mere angry discords of purpose betwixt his generals.

Soult was more anxious to strengthen himself in his own province, where he maintained semi-royal state, than to succour Massena; nevertheless he marched to the banks of the Guadiana, captured Olivenza on January 22, and began the siege of Badajos.

This great frontier fortress was of the utmost strategic value to Wellington. If it fell into the hands of the French, any invasion of Spain by the English became impossible, while the junction betwixt Massena and Soult was made easy. Badajos was held by a Spanish garrison commanded by Menacho, a veteran of approved loyalty and courage. Menacho was unfortunately slain in a gallant sally on March 2, and his successor, Imas, a knave as well as a coward, promptly sold the city to the French. The walls were still unbreached, the garrison was 8000 strong; Beresford, with 12,000 men, was pushing at speed to raise the siege, and was within three days' march. And on March 11, with the letter announcing swift-coming relief in his hand, Imas opened the gates to the French. Wellington pronounced the loss of Badajos the sorest disaster which had yet befallen the British, and it was certainly a great and all-important success for the French. The Spaniard who betrayed Badajos to the French stipulated that he should march out by the breach "to protect his honour." But no breach existed; he had, as Welling-

ton said afterwards, "to make the breach himself out of which to march."

Massena by this time found it impossible to cling longer to Santarem. The country within a radius of fifty miles was a wasted and silent desert. "Nearly ten thousand square miles of country," says Colonel Jones, "remained for five months with scarcely an inhabitant. The wolves, conscious of security, prowled about, masters of the country, reluctantly giving way to the cavalry patrols which occasionally crossed their track." The French army must move, or die of mere starvation and of the diseases bred of starvation. According to Napoleon's plan, Massena was to cross the Tagus and march to join Soult; but Wellington barred every road that led southward, and held the river so strongly that the attempt to cross was vain. Massena then determined to make a flank march to the Mondego—thus moving apparently from Soult—cross that river, press at speed along its farther bank, then turn westward again to Guarda; thence to Ciudad Rodrigo, where his communications would be restored and his forces could be reorganised for a new march to Lisbon.

With the art of an old soldier, Massena effected the first part of this retreat. Leaving Santarem on March 5, he covered his movements with such skill that he gained a clear four days' advance on Wellington. The British, however, came keenly



on his track; Picton, with the third division, being pushed constantly forward to turn Massena's flank, and prevent that westward sweep which was to bring him to Ciudad Rodrigo. Ney covered the French rear-guard with all the skill of a great captain, showing a daring and a resource which he scarcely exceeded eighteen months afterwards, when covering the retreat of Napoleon's shattered columns from Moscow. Picton, whose division was employed in pushing continually past the flank of the French rear-guard, writes that Ney's movements afforded a perfect lesson in the tactics of retreat. "Moving at all times upon his flank, I had an opportunity of seeing everything he did, and I must be dull in the extreme if I have not derived much useful knowledge from such an example."

But it was an army of 35,000 men pursuing one of 60,000. The track, through difficult country, offered a hundred strong situations for defence; and, with a soldier of Ney's fierce and daring temper covering the retreat, almost every day witnessed some gallant stroke of soldiership on both sides. The French, it may be added, destroyed the country through which they passed, with a ferocity bred of hate and anger, and not merely for the sake of making pursuit difficult. Villages and towns were burned, convents were sacked, the peasantry slain. The track of the retreating army was black with ruin and red

with fire and blood. "Nothing," wrote Picton, "can exceed the devastations and cruelty committed by the enemy during the whole course of his retreat." Massena's last marches in Portugal, in a word, were marked by an outburst of inhuman savagery worthy rather of African tribes than of civilised soldiers. Wellington describes the French retreat as made dreadful "by a barbarity seldom equalled and never surpassed."

It is impossible to give in detail the stern and bloody combats bred of a pursuit so keen and a retreat so stubborn and skilful. At Pombal, on March 11, the French attempted to hold an ancient castle which covered the bridge. The riflemen of the Light Division, however, leaped on the castle with so fierce a charge that the French were swept out of it as by a whirlwind, and the bridge was carried so swiftly that, although it was mined, the broken French had not time to blow it up. At Redhina, on March 12, Ney made a resolute stand with 5000 infantry and a strong force of artillery, in order to give time for Massena's guns and baggage to pass through a long mountain defile. Ney's front was so determined that Wellington brought up his main body for the attack. The Light Division went forward with great spirit to turn Ney's right, and an advance was made along the whole British front; but Ney, timing his movements with the coolest accuracy, vanished through the defile just in time



MARSHAL NEY

*From an engraving after the painting by GERARD*





to evade Wellington's onfall. He even turned suddenly on his pursuers, recovering and carrying off a dismounted howitzer by a gallant rush which he himself led. Ney was determined, though in retreat, to maintain a temper of haughty courage in his men.

Wellington's pursuit was so close and eager, that Massena, though he summoned Coimbra, found it impossible to cross the Mondego, and so swung round to Casal Nova, moving up the rugged valley of the Mondego to Guarda. At Casal Nova on the 14th, the fiercest fight of the retreat took place.

A heavy fog shrouded the landscape. The sound of rumbling wheels, the tread of marching battalions, came constantly through the damp air, but the positions of the French were quite hidden. Erskine, who was in charge of the Light Brigade, was a soldier of more fire than discretion. He came up to his pickets, swore with energy, and in spite of the evidence of the men's senses, "there was not a Frenchman in their front," and with great rashness pushed the 52nd forward in column through the fog, the Rifles following. The regiment vanished in the eddying mist; a fierce rattle of musketry presently broke out; suddenly, like some vast aerial curtain, the fog lifted, and then the 52nd found itself thrust into the middle of Ney's entire corps. The regiment, to quote William Napier, "re-

sembled nothing so much as a red pimple on the face of the country, which was black with the French masses."

The 52nd fought gallantly, but it was a duel betwixt a regiment and an army. Wellington came up, and three divisions had to be pushed forward to save the 52nd from being destroyed. Once in this desperate combat the 52nd failed to follow its officers. Napier left four companies of the 52nd in a good position, and took two companies down a deep ravine, in whose gloomy depths he had just heard the shouting charge of the left wing of his regiment. He found himself with his two companies in front of a huge mass of the enemy. He halted for a moment under cover of a wall, and realised that to attack was his single chance. With Captain Dobbs by his side, he called on his men to follow, leaped the wall, and ran with a shout at the enemy. Only two men of the 52nd, however, followed, and here were four men charging an army. Napier tried again to bring up his men, and once more failed. This, he adds, was the bitterest moment of his life. The men, as a matter of fact, were blown from climbing down and up the ravine with their heavy packs; they could hardly lift a foot; and those two particular companies, Napier adds, had been without their captains for some time. Napier himself presently fell, badly wounded, with a musket-bullet lodged near his spine.

At the village of Foy d'Aronce, again, on March 15, Wellington caught Ney in a false position. He had repeated, on a small scale, Craufurd's blunder at the Coa, keeping two divisions on the British side of the Deuca, with only a single bridge by which to retreat. It was rapidly growing dark; thick rain was falling. But Wellington was a captain in whose presence it was singularly dangerous for an opponent to blunder. A glance showed him Ney's fault. Picton was hurled on the French left; the British horse-artillery galloping up, smote its front, and Ney's battalions broke. Some were flung into the river, others effected a bloody retreat across the bridge, but they lost 500 men and an eagle.

On March 16 Wellington halted. He had outmarched his supplies; his men were worn-out with fatigue. But in the game of strategy he had won. Massena had been able neither to move towards Soult, nor to cross the Mondego to reach unexhausted country and leap on Oporto. On the 16th the pursuit was renewed, and Massena fell back to Guarda, and thence to Sabugal. Here he made a last and obstinate stand. To retreat farther was to be pushed across the frontiers of Portugal. While his battalions were still encamped on Portuguese soil, he at least seemed to threaten Lisbon, and a decent mask was put over the despairing visage of defeat; but to re-enter Spain was to make his failure confessed and open. His position at Sabugal was



strong, and Massena had every motive for making a desperate stand. His reputation as a captain was at stake. To be driven in defeat across the Spanish frontier would be a shock to the whole French power in Spain.

Wellington, however, was in a happy mood of generalship. At daybreak the two fighting divisions of the British army—the third and the Light Divisions—with Slade's cavalry, were to ford the Coa; the fifth division and the guns were to carry the bridge of Sabugal, and Regnier's corps, which formed Massena's left wing, would thus be pierced and crushed before Massena's centre could come to its support.

But war has strange chances and mischances. The morning was thick with fog, and Erskine's impatience well-nigh ruined Wellington's combination. The 43rd and a wing of the 95th under Beckwith were launched at the French without support and at the wrong point. Beckwith, in fact, with a single regiment and four companies of Rifles, was assailing an entire French corps with its artillery and cavalry. A breeze blew the fog aside, and at the same moment Beckwith saw his danger and Regnier his opportunity. A heavy French column with guns was sent forward to crush Beckwith's tiny force. The 43rd and 95th, however, were troops who took a great deal of "crushing." The 43rd held the crest of the hill, and resolutely charged and broke the French column as it came up in attack, while the



Rifles tormented the flank of the attacking column with their fire. Again, and yet again, the French column came gallantly on, and was as often driven back. In one of their counter-charges the 43rd actually captured a French howitzer, and round the captured piece a bloody combat raged, the French being as vehement to recover it as the British were stern to hold it.

The 52nd, drawn by the tumult of the fight, came up to the aid of the 43rd. Regnier put his whole reserve—6000 infantry with cavalry and artillery—in motion to crush the two unconquerable British regiments; but by this time Picton's division was coming into the fight, the fifth division had carried the bridge at Sabugal, and Regnier, to escape so formidable a combination, fell hastily back. The fight had raged only an hour, but round the dismounted howitzer lay more than 300 of the slain, while the French wounded or captured exceeded 1200. "This," wrote Wellington, "was one of the most glorious actions British troops ever engaged in." "We have given the French," he added, "a handsome dressing, and I think they will not say again that we are not a manœuvring army. We may not manœuvre so beautifully as they do; but I do not desire better sport than to meet one of their columns *en masse* with our lines. The poor second corps received a terrible beating from the 43rd and 52nd on the 3rd."

On April 4th, Massena was in full retreat; on the 5th, he crossed the frontier into Spain, and fell back through Ciudad Rodrigo to Salamanca, and Wellington stood on the Portuguese frontier, visible to Europe as one of the great soldiers of the age. He had saved Portugal! He had arrested and rolled back the most formidable invasion that country had ever known. He had driven the most famous of French marshals, commanding an army of French veterans, in ruin and defeat back into Spain. The mere arithmetic of Massena's losses is amazing. Nearly 40,000 Frenchmen had perished or had been taken prisoners in the six months which elapsed betwixt September 16, 1810, when Massena, in all the pride of apparently irresistible strength, had entered Portugal, and April 5, 1811, when, with broken fortunes and wrecked fame, he re-crossed the Spanish frontier. And in discipline and character, as well as in health and numbers, the French suffered to an extent which arithmetic can hardly express.

A French pen may describe the aspect Massena's army wore when it re-crossed the Portuguese frontier. "They marched in disorderly crowds," says Thiers, "loaded with plunder, mingled with long files of wounded borne by asses, with artillery and baggage waggons drawn by oxen, for the greater part of the horses had died from want of nourishment. Hardly did there remain horses enough to manœuvre the guns in the presence of the enemy, and the cavalry

were in such a state of exhaustion that the riders could not venture to give their steeds the rein for a charge. The soldiers, blackened by the sun, thin, covered with rags, without shoes, but still bold and audacious in language, did not support their distress with the resignation which sometimes dignifies misfortune. They vented their ill-humour on all the world for so many sufferings undergone for no purpose; they broke out against their immediate superiors, the generals-in-chief, the Emperor himself."

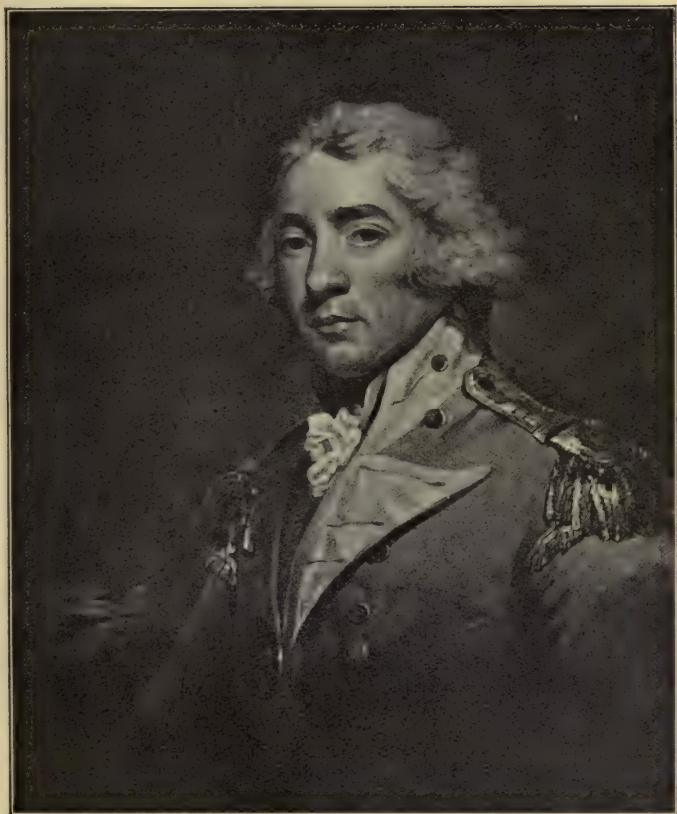
## CHAPTER XIX

### BAROSSA AND FUENTES

MEANWHILE, on March 6, the day after Massena commenced his retreat from Santarem, and five days before Soult captured Badajos, a great blow had been struck at the French arms in front of Cadiz, a blow which recalled Soult abruptly to the south, and helped still further to defeat Napoleon's plans for the conquest of Portugal.

Victor, with 20,000 men, held Cadiz blockaded, and Graham, who commanded the English contingent in Cadiz, as soon as he knew of Soult's march northward framed a bold scheme for driving Victor from his lines. Napier describes Graham as "a daring old man and of ready temper for battle." He was a soldier by natural genius rather than by training. A Scotch laird, with Scottish shrewdness in his brain and the martial temper of a fighting clan in his blood, Graham had outlived his youth when, driven by domestic grief, he sought consolation in a soldier's life. In 1794, when he was nearly fifty years of age, he raised a regiment of Scottish volunteers, afterwards the famous





THOMAS GRAHAM, LORD LYNEDOC

*From a mezzotint after the painting by J. HOPPNER, R.A.*



90th. He served in Egypt as colonel of that regiment, was aide-de-camp to Moore at Corunna, commanded a brigade at Walcheren, and was in 1810-11 in command of the British garrison at Cadiz. Graham's face reveals his character—strong, shrewd, manly; not the face of a diplomatist or of a statesman, perhaps, but the face of a man capable of standing unshaken in disaster, and from whose look and bearing in the hour of danger weaker men would catch courage.

Graham's plan was to sail from Cadiz, land at Algeiras, march inland, and fling himself on Victor's rear. La Pena, the Spanish Captain-General, with 7000 Spaniards, was in command; Graham had 4000 British troops. It was a perilous, not to say rash, attempt. A mixed force of less than 12,000 men, of whom 7000 were Spaniards, and under a Spanish general, were to attack 20,000 French troops under a famous French marshal. There was no element of surprise, moreover, in the expedition. Victor knew exactly his enemy's plans.

The expedition, with some difficulty, landed at Algeiras, and La Pena illustrated all the characteristics of Spanish generalship in the operations which followed. He scorned counsel; he took no precautions. He rambled on, as though engaged in a picnic, ran his army into an almost hopeless position, and then allowed his British allies to do all the fighting.

On March 5 Victor found La Pena marching across

his front from Barossa, a coastal ridge, rugged and low, to the parallel ridge of Bermega, some five miles distant. Victor had in hand three divisions commanded by Laval, Ruffin, and Villatte, making a force of 9000 good troops with fourteen guns. He thrust Ruffin's division in column past Graham's rear, and seized the Barossa height, while Laval moved to strike at Graham's flank. La Pena meanwhile marched off into space with great diligence, some companies of Walloon guards and some guerilla cavalry alone wheeling round as the roar of the guns broke out behind them, and coming up to aid Graham. Graham thus found himself suddenly assailed by a French army double his own in numbers; his Spanish allies were hurrying off beyond the horizon; one French column was in possession of his baggage, and another about to smite him on the flank.

Graham's rear-guard consisted of the flank companies of the 9th and 82nd, under Major Brown. Graham sent him the single message, "Fight;" then, with instant decision, he wheeled his columns round, sent one of his divisions under General Dilkes to storm the Barossa ridge, and launched the other, under Wheatley, against Laval. Duncan's guns, attached to Wheatley's brigade, opened a rapid fire on Laval's columns, whilst Barnard took his riflemen out at speed and skirmished fiercely with the enemy. The contest with Laval was determined by a rough,



vehemently sustained charge of the 87th and three companies of the Coldstreams. It was a charge which for daring almost rivalled that of the Fusiliers at Albuera, and Laval's massive battalions were simply wrecked by it.

Brown, meanwhile, obeying Graham's orders literally, was standing in the path of Ruffin's whole force, fighting indomitably with half his men down. Dilkes' brigade came up at the double. The hurrying regiments saw before them Brown's gallant companies dwindled to a handful, yet fighting desperately against a whole French division. The English regiments, roused to passion at the sight, did not pause to fall into line, but stormed up the ridge, and were met by the French with a courage as high as their own. Ruffin himself was slain; his second in command fell mortally wounded. By the mere strength of their attack, and the swift and thundering volleys, which clothed their front with a spray of flame, the British broke the French columns and drove them from the ridge with the loss of three guns.

The fight lasted only an hour and a half; for suddenness and for fury it is not easily paralleled. But on the part of the British it represents a very gallant achievement. Deserted by their allies, they yet overthrew a force more than double their own in number, with the loss to themselves of 1200 killed and wounded. Every fourth man in the British ranks, that is, was struck down. The French killed and

wounded amounted to 2300, two of their generals were slain, they lost six guns and an eagle, and 500 prisoners. The victory was due mainly to Graham's instant resolve to attack, a resolution so wise and so sudden that, says Napier, it may well be described as "an inspiration." But even Graham's generalship would have been in vain had it not been for the stern valour and warlike energy of his incomparable troops.

La Pena watched the battle as a remote and disinterested spectator; but when the victory was won, he appeared on the scene to claim the glory of the fight, and to accuse Graham of disobedience to his orders! La Pena, it may be added—again in the characteristic Spanish fashion—refused to assist the British by either supplying food for the living or helping to bury the dead. Graham, in a mood of dour Scotch fury, marched his men off the battlefield, and refused further co-operation with this remarkable ally. In a sense Barossa was a barren victory. Victor remained in possession of his lines in front of Cadiz; but the shock of Graham's feat brought Soult back into Andalusia, and so helped to make impossible any combination with Massena. The Spanish Cortes conferred on Graham a grandeeship of Spain, with the title of "Duke of the Cerro de la Cabeza del Puerco." That title in Spanish is sonorous and imposing. Translated into English it simply means "Duke of the Hill of the Pig's Head"—the local

name of Barossa. Graham, however, had lost his regard for all things Spanish, and declined a title so curious.

The campaign for the rest of the year eddies round the great frontier fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo, Almeida, and Badajos. Wellington was resolute to capture these, the French generals were keen to hold them. If strongly held, Badajos would stand as a rocky bar betwixt two great French armies of the north and south, and make any concert betwixt them impossible. Almeida and Ciudad Rodrigo stood in the path of any invasion of Portugal from the north.

Massena guarded Almeida. Soult had charge of the defence of Badajos. Wellington was now blockading Almeida; twice he attempted to besiege Badajos, but each time the attempt drew upon him some overwhelming combination of French armies, and the two great battles of 1811, Fuentes d'Onore and Albuera, were part of the price the British troops had to pay for the explosion which threw Almeida into the hands of Massena, and the treachery of the Spaniard who sold Badajos to Soult.

Wellington on April 21 put Beresford, with 20,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry, and eighteen guns, in charge of the operations for the capture of Badajos. As a preliminary he had to relieve Campo Mayor, then besieged by Mortier. Campo Mayor, as a matter of fact, had surrendered on March 21, and Beresford only reached the place four days after its fall, on



March 25. It was promptly recaptured, the fighting round the place being made noteworthy by a memorable charge of the 13th Dragoons under Colonel Head. A French convoy, with battering train, had just moved out of Campo Mayor on its way to Badajos, under the guard of a strong cavalry force; and the 13th, with some Portuguese squadrons under Otway, were launched at the convoy. The French horsemen gallantly turned on them. The squadrons met at full gallop with loose reins and raised swords, and neither side flinched. The English, riding more compactly, broke through the French, wheeled, and once more rode through them. The French finally gave way and scattered, and the 13th, with the rapture of battle in their blood, galloped on, cut down the riders of the battering train, and rode up to the very bridge of Badajos. The French lost 300 men and a gun. A corporal of the 13th slew the colonel of the 26th French dragoons in single combat, cleaving his head in twain.

Had the furious ride of the 13th been adequately sustained, the French would have lost their entire battering train, and the defence of Badajos would have been almost destroyed. Wellington displayed sometimes a curious impatience with exploits of this character; they won from him nothing but acrid and mis-timed rebuke. "The conduct of the 13th," he wrote, "was that of a rabble, galloping as fast as their horses would carry them over a plain after an



enemy to whom they could do no mischief when they were broken." "If the 13th Dragoons," he added, "are again guilty of this conduct, I shall take their horses from them." "The unsparing admiration of the whole army," Napier says significantly, "consoled them for that rebuke." Beresford, as a matter of fact, lacked exactly that element of fiery dash which the 13th displayed so magnificently at Campo Mayor, and his slowness enabled Philippon, who was in command of Badajos, to close its breach and repair its defences, and so made possible the bloodiest and most disastrous siege of the Peninsular war.

Wellington was now blockading Almeida and besieging Badajos at the same moment. It was certain that Massena would march to the relief of Almeida, and Soult strike hard in defence of Badajos. To maintain his attack on these two fortresses, Wellington must fight; and so there followed the two great battles of Fuentes d'Onore and Albuera.

Beresford opened his trenches before Badajos on April 21, and Wellington reckoned that he had three weeks in which to carry the place. By that time Soult would certainly appear to relieve it. But before that period expired Massena was moving from Salamanca in order to raise the blockade of Almeida, and Wellington marched to meet him. Drouet had joined Massena with 11,000 infantry and cavalry, and he had now a force of 46,000 good soldiers, including

5000 cavalry. Wellington, on the other hand, had only 32,000 infantry, 1500 cavalry, and 42 guns. On May 3, Wellington took up a position on a tableland in front of Almeida, his left resting on Fort Concepcion, his right being behind the village of Fuentes d'Onore, with the Coa in his rear. This was the weak point in his position. If driven back, all his guns must cross by a single narrow bridge—a perilous operation with a victorious foe hanging on his rear. Massena's plan was to turn the British right by carrying the village of Fuentes, seize the only bridge across the Coa, and then fling his overwhelming cavalry strength on the British centre and left, and drive Wellington's broken army into the Coa.

Fuentes was held by some light companies from the 1st and 3rd divisions, and on the evening of the 3rd Loison made a desperate attempt to carry the village. The attack of the French was urged with such fire, and was so overpowering in strength, that the light companies holding the village were driven, stubbornly fighting, through the streets to its very skirts. Then the 24th, the 71st, and the 79th regiments, coming down swiftly from the high ground above Fuentes, drove the French in turn from the village. The 71st was largely a Glasgow regiment, and its colonel, Cadogan, as he took them forward to the charge, shouted, "Now, my lads, let us show them how we can clear the Gallowgate." The sound of that homely name, with all its associations, kindled

Battle of  
FUENTES D'ONORE  
5th. May, 1811.

☒ Allies      ☐ French



Walker & Bontall sc.



the Scotsmen. The French stood their ground gallantly, and as a result there came the actual clash of opposing bayonets. "The French," says Alison, with a touch of uncomfortable realism, "were driven back literally at the bayonet's point, and some who stood their ground were spiked and carried back some paces on the British bayonets." The French were finally swept through Fuentes, and driven in disorder across a rivulet on its further side. The 71st, eagerly following, saw across the rivulet what, in the dusk, they took for a French gun. They charged eagerly through the stream and the gloom, and carried it off in triumph—to discover it was only a tumbril!

On the 4th Massena made a careful study of Wellington's position. It had the weakness of being too far extended. On the urgent counsel of Sir Brent Spencer, Wellington had prolonged his right to hold a hill considerably beyond Fuentes, and his battle-line now covered a front of seven miles. This was one of the rare occasions on which Wellington took somebody else's advice, and the advice was wrong. A line so extended was necessarily weak, and gave Massena a chance which he eagerly seized. His plan was to roll back Wellington's too-extended right wing, and at the same moment carry the village of Fuentes, so as to cut the attacked wing clean off from the British centre. The tactical story of the battle may be told almost in a sentence.



The attempt to carry Fuentes failed, and Wellington saved his right wing by swinging it back, through the central fury of the fight, to a position at right angles with his line—a memorable feat of coolness and discipline.

On the morning of the 5th the battle opened with a brilliant charge of French cavalry. They came on in overpowering strength, lancers, dragoons, cuirassiers, glittering with steel and gay with tossing plumes. The English had not more than 1000 sabres on the field, while the French had 29 squadrons of cavalry, including 800 horsemen of the Imperial Guard. The British cavalry were thrust back, gallantly fighting, by the mere weight of the French masses. Ramsay's battery of horse-artillery disappeared in the rush of the French squadrons, and the shout was raised, "Ramsay is cut off!" Montbrun's fiery horsemen, riding fiercely but in somewhat broken order, swept onward to the steady ranks of the 7th division. They had captured a British battery, and they were eager to break a British square! But as they rode, to quote a fine passage from Napier, "a great commotion was observed in their main body: men and horses were observed to close with confusion and tumult towards one point, where a thick dust and loud cries, and the sparkling of blades and flashing of pistols, indicated some extraordinary occurrence. Suddenly the multitude became violently agitated, an English shout

pealed high and clear, the mass was rent asunder, and Norman Ramsay burst forth, sword in hand, at the head of his battery; his horses, breathing fire, stretched like greyhounds along the plain, the guns bounded behind them like things of no weight, and the mounted gunners followed close, with heads bent low, and pointed weapons, in desperate career." Ramsay, in a word, at the sword's point, and by sheer hard fighting, had broken loose from his captors and brought off his guns.

Wellington had quickly realised that his position was too extended, and he had to take in hand the perilous task of swinging his right wing back, using Fuentes as a pivot, across the plain, now practically held by the triumphant French horse, to a ridge that ran back at right angles from Fuentes. The ridge was pierced by a streamlet called the Turones, which ran across the plain to the rear of the position, at that perilous moment held by the two divisions—the 7th and the Light—forming the British right. The 7th division had to ford the Turones and march along its farther bank to the ridge. The Light Division had to move across the open plain, and occupy, in line with the 7th, that part of the ridge betwixt the streamlet and Fuentes. Thus the two divisions, throughout this most perilous manœuvre, were divided by the Turones.

The task of the 7th division was comparatively easy, but that of the Light Division was one of the

most perilous ever attempted in war. The plain was crowded with camp-followers, baggage-carts, &c. It lay open to the charge of the exultant French cavalry, and Montbrun's horsemen—some of them cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard—were riding fiercely beside the steady formation of the British, watching for an opportunity to charge. The Light Division squares in that confused scene appeared, says Napier, "but as specks," and these moving "specks" of dogged, disciplined infantry were swallowed up in a mass of 5000 horsemen, "trampling, bounding, shouting for the word to charge." But nothing shook the steady ranks of the Light Division. "The squares of bayonets," said one who watched the scene, "were sometimes lost sight of amid the forest of glittering sabres;" but onward they moved as steady as fate. Repeatedly Montbrun's dragoons galloped almost to the very points of the steady bayonets, but fell back before the rolling musketry volleys. Alternately halting and firing, the disciplined squares marched on. A rallying square of skirmishers, who had not had time to reach the regiment, was indeed broken by the French cavalry, but the lines of the Light Division were not even shaken. Massena ordered up the artillery of the Guard, but some delay occurred, and the French guns only reached the scene in time to open a distant fire on Houston's regiments.

Napier, who was an eye-witness, declares the French never came within sure shot distance of the



Light Division. "That fine body was formed in three squares flanking each other; they retired over the plain leisurely, without the loss of a man, without a sabre wound being received. They moved," adds Napier, "in the most majestic manner, secure in their discipline and strength, which were such as would have defied all the cavalry that ever charged under Tamerlane or Genghis!"

The British divisions had now reached their new position, and Wellington's battle-line, though bent almost at right angles, was secure. Meanwhile it was part of Massena's plan that Drouet should carry Fuentes, the pivot of this movement, and so break the British line at the moment when Montbrun, it was expected, would be rolling back in mere ruin the extended British right wing. Drouet, carrying out this plan, attacked Fuentes d'Onore with great energy and fire. The 24th, 71st, and 79th clung obstinately to the village against vastly superior numbers, but were driven from house to house, till they held merely the upper edge of the village. The rolling of musketry volleys was incessant. The fighting was hand-to-hand. Two companies of the 79th were taken; Cameron, its colonel, was slain. The 74th and 88th were brought up to the fight. A French regiment, the 45th, distinguishable by the long red feathers in the head-dress of its men, fought with splendid courage. Its eagle was planted on the outward wall of the village nearest the British



position, and became the centre round which raged a furious battle. When the gallant French regiment was at last driven back by a charge of the 88th, nearly 100 of its number were found dead around the splintered pole of its eagle. The slaughter amongst the 79th was great, and Costello says that after the fight was over, one of the Rifles collected in the village two arm's-full of black feathers he had taken from the bonnets of the slain Highlanders.

The charge of the 88th finally drove the French through the village with overwhelming fury. Picton, a few days before, had occasion to rebuke that regiment for some plundering exploits, and, in his characteristic fashion, told them they were "the greatest blackguards in the army." Wellington, it will be remembered, described Picton as being "a rough, foul-mouthed devil as ever lived." That was a cruel exaggeration; but Picton no doubt was an expert in the rough vernacular of the camp. When the 88th returned breathless, and with blackened faces, from the charge, Picton, waving the stick he always carried in his hand, shouted "Well done the brave 88th." Whereupon a voice from the ranks, in the rich brogue of Connaught, cried, "Are we the greatest blackguards in the army now?" "No, no," replied Picton, "you are brave and gallant soldiers." The ensign who carried the colours of the 79th in this dreadful struggle was killed. The covering sergeant immediately called out, "An officer to bear

the colours of the 79th!" One came forward, and was instantly struck down. "An officer to bear the colours of the 79th!" again shouted the sergeant, and another hero succeeded, who was also killed. A third time, and a fourth, the sergeant called out in like manner as the bearers of the colours were successively struck down; till at length no officer remained unwounded but the adjutant, who sprang forward and seized the colours, saying, "The 79th shall never want one to carry its colours while I can stand."

When the French were driven out of the village the battle practically ceased. Massena lingered sullenly in front of the British position for two days. On the 6th, by way of impressing the imagination of Wellington's battalions, he marched his finest regiments past the front of the British position. But the imagination of the British private is not susceptible to this kind of appeal. "They looked uncommonly well," wrote an officer of the Rifle Brigade, "and we were proud to think we had beaten such fine-looking fellows so lately!" This was certainly not the reflection which Massena wished to excite in the British mind. On the 7th Massena drew off. His attempt to raise the blockade of Almeida had failed, and while the losses of the British did not exceed 1500 men and officers, that of the French was more than double that number. The lanes, the churchyards, the gardens in the

village of Fuentes were literally piled with their slain. It was the last battle Massena fought in the Peninsula. Marmont replaced him, and, with sorely damaged fame, Massena turned his back on Spanish battlefields.

Fuentes d'Onore is a fight which does credit to the warlike qualities of the British private, but does not add to Wellington's fame as a general; and though Massena failed to raise the blockade of Almeida, yet the garrison, by a desperate stroke, broke out of the fortress, having destroyed its guns and blown up its defences, and made their escape with comparatively little loss. The drowsiness or the stupidity of a British officer made the escape of the French possible; and it was in reference to this incident that Wellington, with that touch of gall which sometimes flavoured his correspondence, wrote that he "began to be of opinion that there is nothing on earth so stupid as a gallant officer!"

When the escaping French reached the main body, Brennier, their chief, was carried in triumph through the French camp on his soldiers' shoulders. He had his own strong personal reasons for joy over his escape. He had already been a prisoner to the English, and had broken his parole; and he might have fared badly had he been recaptured.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE ALBUERA CAMPAIGN

BERESFORD was now besieging Badajos, and trying to compensate with the blood of his gallant troops for a hopeless inadequacy of siege material. That strong place, however, guarded by the genius of Philippon, an unsurpassed master in the art of defence, resisted all assaults, and Soult was coming up by forced marches from the south to raise the siege. Beresford abandoned his attempt on Badajos, though his engineers promised to carry the place in three days. Blake joined him with a strong Spanish force, and on the 15th he was across the Guadiana, and stood in position at Albuera, ready to fight Soult. At three o'clock on the afternoon of the 15th the French light horsemen were riding in front of the ridge of Albuera, while far beyond to the edge of the horizon clouds of whirling dust told of the speed with which Soult's columns were advancing.

Soult's force was inferior in numbers to Beresford's, but as far as martial qualities are concerned it was one of the finest armies that ever marched





LORD BERESFORD

*From an engraving after the painting by SIR WILLIAM BEECHEY, R.A.*



and fought under the French eagles. It numbered 19,000 infantry, 4000 cavalry, and 40 guns. The men were veterans, proud of their general, eager for battle, and confident of victory; and these are conditions under which French soldiers are very formidable. Blake had joined Beresford with 15,000 Spaniards, bringing the British general's force up to 30,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry, and 38 guns. But of this composite force only 7000 were British; the Spaniards were ill-disciplined, ill-officered, and in a condition of semi-starvation. As the battle proved, they could stand in patient ranks and die, but they could not manœuvre. Blake was ignorant, proud, and fiercely jealous of the British commander-in-chief. He was of Irish blood, but kept nothing of the Irishman except the name. Blake had lost, in a word, all the virtues proper to the Irish character, and had acquired all the vices peculiar to the Spanish temper. And Beresford was not, like Wellington, a great captain with a masterful will. He was a third-rate general, who could neither meet with equal art Soult's strategy nor override Blake's obstinacy. Beresford, indeed, had already practically given away the battle to Soult by allowing that quick-witted and subtle commander to seize a wooded hill immediately under the British right wing, from which he could leap suddenly and with overpowering strength on the weak point of Beresford's position. All the conditions, in a word, were in favour of the French.

There remained to Beresford only the unsurpassed fighting qualities of his British regiments.

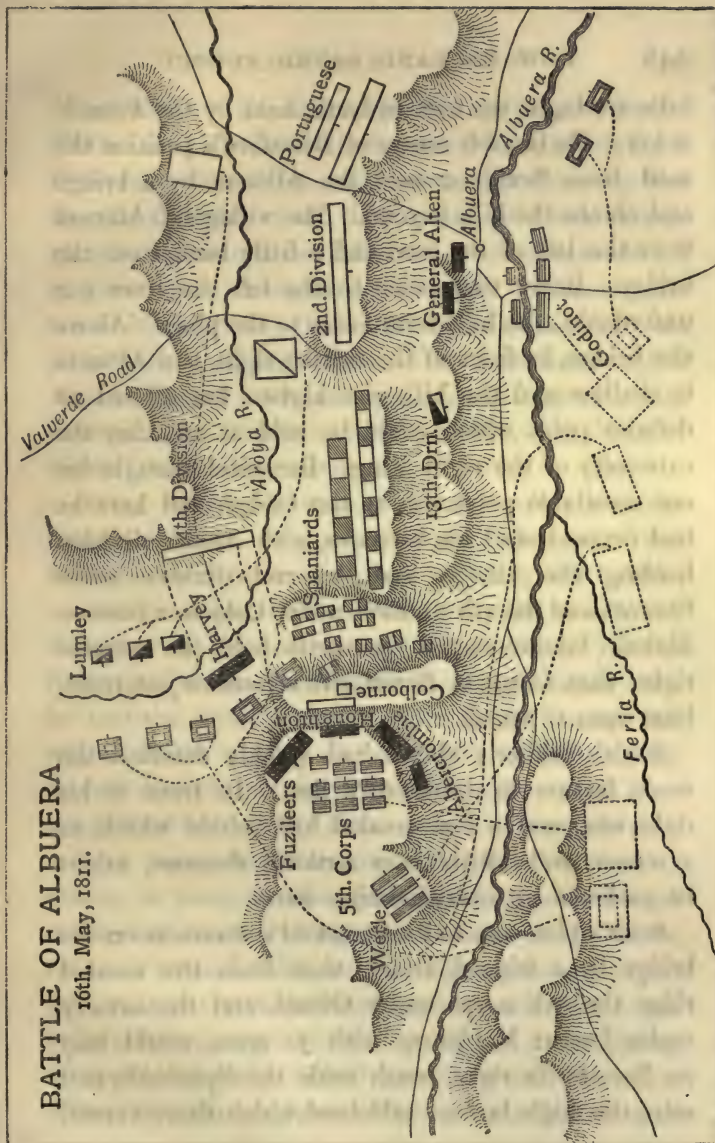
In a sense these regiments were responsible for the stand Beresford was now making. Albuera, as far as the British were concerned, was a battle without a motive. It was not fought to cover the siege of Badajos, for that siege was already abandoned. But Beresford's regiments were eager to fight. They had taken no part in the recent combats under Wellington. Busaco had been fought and Fuentes d'Onore won without them, and, with a French army advancing to engage them, they were angrily reluctant to fall back. It added to Beresford's difficulties that he had taken Hill's place in command of the army. The contrast between the placid Hill, an English country gentleman in a cocked-hat, and Beresford, a fiery Irishman, who was only a Portuguese general, and had, in addition, the bar-sinister across his name, was startling. Beresford could not hold, with easy and calm authority, the high-spirited troops under his command; and that circumstance goes far to explain why Albuera was fought. Beresford himself, on his fighting side, sympathised with his men, and the general in him was not wise enough nor masterful enough to conquer the mere blind combative impulse which drove him and his troops to make a dogged stand.

The scene of the battle is a line of hills along whose eastern front flows the river Albuera. The



# BATTLE OF ALBUERA

16th. May, 1811.



Walker & Bondall &c.

from Napier's "Peninsular War."

hills are high ; the eastern bank, held by the French, is low. On the left centre of Beresford's position the road from Seville crosses the Albuera by a bridge and climbs the hills beyond. The village of Albuera is to the left of the road and a little back from the bridge. Below that point to the left the river was unfordable ; the hills sank lower to the plain. Above the bridge, in front of the British right, the Albuera is shallow and the hills rise higher, but offered no definite point which could be held as marking the extremity of the right wing. Beresford thought his one assailable point was at the bridge, and here he had concentrated his batteries, with Alten's division holding the village, and the 2nd division under Stewart and the 4th division under Cole as a reserve. Blake's famine-wasted Spaniards held the extreme right, that being, in Beresford's erroneous judgment, least open to attack.

Soult's soldierly glance had quickly detected the weak feature in Beresford's line. In front of his right wing was a low wooded hill, behind which, as a screen, and within easy striking distance, might be gathered an overwhelming force.

Soult's plan was to fix Beresford's attention on the bridge by a feigned attack, then from the wooded ridge the 5th corps under Girard, and the cavalry under Latour Maubourg, with 30 guns, would leap on Beresford's right, brush aside the Spaniards, and seize the high broken tableland which there curved

round it till it almost looked into the rear of Beresford's line. He could then cut off the British from their only line of retreat; and, caught between the French and the river, they must, as Soult triumphantly calculated, be destroyed or surrender. With exquisite skill Soult, without visibly weakening his battle-line, actually gathered 15,000 men and 20 guns within leaping distance of Beresford's right. A general with such an unsuspected tempest about to break upon him from within musket-shot distance seemed predoomed to ruin.

At 9 o'clock a strong French column under Goudinot, with 10 guns, pouring out smoke and flame in their front, advanced to attack the bridge; a second column, under Werle, followed in support. Beresford in one point resembled Massena. He was hesitating in his tactics till the battle began, but he had the soldierly brain which grows clearer and keener in the roar of cannon. He noticed that the second French column did not push on in close support of the first. As a matter of fact, as soon as the rising battle-smoke had formed a sort of screen, it wheeled sharply to the left, and at the quick-step moved along the eastern bank of the Albuera towards the British right. Beresford at that moment guessed Soult's plan. His right was to be attacked; and he sent an aide-de-camp, riding at speed, to order Blake to wheel his battalions round at right angles to their present position, so



as to check any attempt to turn the British position. He despatched the second division to support Blake, and moved his horse-artillery and cavalry towards his threatened right. Blake, however, proved obstinate. His Spanish pride resented receiving orders from anybody; perhaps he doubted whether, if he attempted to change the position of his battalions, they would not dissolve in mere flight. Beresford came up in person to enforce his orders, and while the generals wrangled and the Spanish battalions had begun to wheel clumsily back, Soult's thunderbolt fell.

Girard's columns came swiftly across the stream and mounted the face of the hill. The French guns moved at the trot before them, halting every fifty yards to pour a tempest of iron on the shaken Spanish battalions, while Latour Maubourg's lancers and dragoons, galloping in a wider curve, threatened soon to break in on Blake's rear. Beresford was, if not a great general, at least the most gallant of soldiers, and, with voice and gesture, he strove to send the Spaniards forward in a resolute charge against the French as they were deploying to turn his flank. Nothing, however, could persuade the Spaniards to advance. They stood their ground and fired hasty volleys into mere space, but would not—perhaps they could not from sheer physical weakness—charge. In his wrath, Beresford, a man of great personal strength, seized a Spanish ensign with his



flag, and ran him fiercely out through the smoke towards the quickly-moving French line. But the Spaniards would not follow, and the ensign, when released, simply ran back to his regiment, as a solitary sheep which had been cut off might rush back to the flock! Only thirty stormy and tumultuous minutes had passed since Soult's attack had been launched; but already two-thirds of the French army, in compact order of battle, were drawn at right angles across Beresford's front. The Spaniards were in disorder. The French guns, steadily advancing, were scourging Blake's shaken line with grape, and Soult's cavalry, riding fast, were out-flanking them.

Otway's Portuguese cavalry moved out so as to check the French cavalry from coming down to attack the village from the rear, and Stewart's division came swiftly up to support the broken Spaniards. The first brigade, under Colborne, consisted of the Buffs, the 66th, the 31st, and the 2nd battalion of the 48th. Stewart led the brigade in person. Colborne, a cool soldier, wished to deploy before ascending the ridge on whose crest the fight was raging, but Stewart was of an impatient temper. He knew how deadly the crisis was. The shouts of the French grew ever more triumphant, the flash of their guns gleamed ever closer; and Stewart took up his regiments in column of companies past the Spanish right, and made the battalions deploy into

line successively as they came in front of the enemy. These were hasty and perilous tactics.

The scene was one of wildest confusion. A furious rainfall made the hillside slippery. The air was full of a dense fog made blacker with battle smoke. At that moment, through the fog, to the British right came the low thunder of galloping hoofs. The volume of sound grew deeper. The grey vapour sparkled with swiftly moving points of steel. Suddenly out of the fog broke, with bent heads and the tossing manes of horses, a far-stretching line of charging cavalry. The English regiments, in a word, were caught in the very act of deploying, and over them, with exultant shouts, with thrust of lance and stroke of sword, the French cavalry swept. In less than five minutes two-thirds of the brigade went down. The Buffs, the 66th, the 48th were practically trodden out of existence; six guns were captured.

A lancer charged Beresford as he sat, solitary and huge, with despair in his heart, amidst the tumult. Beresford put the lance aside with one hand, caught the adventurous Frenchman by the throat with the other, and dashed him to the ground. The 31st, handled more promptly, and perhaps reached by the French cavalry a little later, had fallen swiftly into square. It stood fast, a sort of red parallelogram outlined in steel and fire, and upon its steadfast faces the French horsemen rode in vain. But this

was all that survived of what ten minutes before had been a gallant brigade. D'Urban says that the disaster which befell Colborne's brigade arose not from its delay in deploying, but from Stewart's refusal of Colborne's request that the right wing of one regiment should be kept in column.

Many thrilling incidents are still told of this wild scene. The king's colour of the Buffs was defended by Lieutenant Latham with unsurpassed courage. A stroke of a French sabre almost divided his face, a second blow struck off his left arm and the hand which held the colour; he was thrust through with lances and trodden underneath the hoofs of the galloping horses, and left for dead. But as he lay on the ground, with his solitary hand he tore the colour from the pole and thrust it under his bleeding body, where it was found hidden after the fight was over. An ensign named Thomas, only fifteen years old, carried the regimental colour of the Buffs when the torrent of lancers broke his regiment and the captain of his company was struck down. This mere boy took command of the company, crying out, in shrill youthful treble, "Rally on me, men; I will be your pivot." The fluttering colour he held drew the French swordsmen down upon him in eager swarms; his youth for a moment moved the pity of even the fierce French horsemen; he was called upon to give up the colours. He refused and was slain, still clinging to the staff. Of that particular com-



ford's best quality, his fighting courage, for a moment wavered. He resolved to retreat, and commenced to make preparations for falling back. He did not realise the ruin a rearward movement would cause; nor did he remember what resources yet remained to him. The battle was saved by the quickness and resource of Colonel Hardinge, who afterwards won fame in India, and who now brought up Cole with the 4th division into the fight, and the 3rd brigade of the 2nd division under Abercromby. Cole's brigade had started from Badajos at eleven the preceding night, and marching without halt, reached the scene of the fight just as the French lancers had executed their triumphant charge on Colborne's regiments. The brigade had scarcely halted when Hardinge, riding up, urged Cole to advance. Cole's first brigade, consisting of two Fusilier regiments, the 7th and 23rd, under Meyers, marched straight up to the crest of the hill. Abercromby came up its left flank.

It was the crisis of the fight. The scanty wrecks of Houghton's regiments were beginning to fall back. Soult, at last, had pushed his whole reserves into the fight. The field was heaped with carcasses. The French columns were advancing with a tempest of triumphant shouts. Then, through the fog, on the right of the groups which yet survived of Houghton's brigade, came in long and steady line Cole's Fusiliers. Abercromby's regiments at the same moment came round the flank of the hill.



In an instant the physiognomy of the battle was changed. Girard's massive column found itself smitten at once on front and flank with a crushing fire. The answering fire of the French was of course deadly, but it failed to stop the gallant Fusiliers. One of the noblest passages in British prose literature is that in which Napier describes their onfall. Something of the tumult and passion of the battle, of the clash of steel, and of the roll of musketry volleys—something, too, of the triumph of victory, still rings through its resonant syllables, and the often-quoted sentences may be quoted once more:—

“Such a gallant line,” says Napier, “arising from amid the smoke, and rapidly separating itself from the confused and broken multitude, startled the enemy's masses, which were increasing and pressing forward as to assured victory; they wavered, hesitated, and then, vomiting forth a storm of fire, hastily endeavoured to enlarge their front, while the fearful discharge of grape from all their artillery whistled through the British ranks. Myers was killed, Cole and the three colonels—Ellis, Blackeney, and Hawkshawe—fell wounded, and the Fusilier battalions, struck by the iron tempest, reeled and staggered like sinking ships. Suddenly and sternly recovering, they closed on their terrible enemies, and then was seen with what a strength and majesty the British soldier fights. In vain did Soult, by voice and gesture, animate his Frenchmen; in vain did the hardiest veterans break from the crowded columns and sacrifice their lives to gain time for the mass to open on such a fair field; in vain did the mass itself bear up, and, fiercely striving, fire indiscriminately on friends and foes, while the horsemen, hovering on the flanks, threatened to charge the advancing line.

“Nothing could stop that astonishing infantry. No sudden burst of undisciplined valour, no nervous enthusiasm weakened

the stability of their order ; their flashing eyes were bent on the dark columns in front, their measured tread shook the ground, their dreadful volleys swept away the head of every formation, their deafening shouts overpowered the dissonant cries that broke from all parts of the tumultuous crowd as slowly, and with a horrid carnage, it was driven by the incessant vigour of the attack to the farthest edge of the hill. In vain did the French reserves mix with the struggling multitude to sustain the fight ; their efforts only increased the irremediable confusion, and the mighty mass, breaking off like a loosened cliff, went headlong down the ascent. The rain flowed after in streams discoloured with blood, and 1800 unwounded men, the remnant of 6000 unconquerable British soldiers, stood triumphant on the fatal hill."

Beresford, it seems, though he praised Cole's advance in his despatch, privately regarded it as a blunder. It is disputed whether Hardinge ordered Cole in Beresford's name to advance, or only urged him, with more or less vehemence, to do it. Cole himself has decided the point as to whether Hardinge, in Napier's phrase, "boldly ordered General Cole to advance." Hardinge himself said he only offered "urgent advice," but advice which "his position on Beresford's staff made semi-authoritative." As a matter of fact, Hardinge was at Albuera an aide-de-camp of twenty-three or twenty-four. Cole had express orders from Beresford not to leave his position without special instructions, and Cole declares that it was his personal resolution, not Hardinge's advice, still less Hardinge's "orders," which made him take the great responsibility of advancing.

The Fusilier brigade consisted of the 1st and 2nd

battalions of the 7th, and the 1st battalion of the 23rd, 1500 rank and file. The cavalry tried to repeat on Cole's brigade their performance on Colborne's, and a battalion of the 7th at quarter distance formed square at every halt to cover the right wing of the Fusiliers. The French cavalry charged; it is said, indeed, they actually broke the right of the Fusiliers, but were driven off by the stubborn courage of that regiment and by a volley from some Portuguese.

The fatal mistake on the French side was Girard's advance with the 5th corps in close column. The British, firing from a wide front, and firing coolly, completely crushed the head of the column. Girard tried to deploy to his right, but the fire of the English was too fierce, the space too contracted, the confusion in his own ranks too great. The leading French regiment broke, having lost 600 men, and the other French regiments in turn gave way, scorched by the terrific fire poured on them, till the whole mass rolled in confusion down to the stream and beyond it.

## CHAPTER XXI

### AFTER ALBUERA

SOULT fell sullenly back, covering his retreat with his cavalry, and at three o'clock the firing had died away. During the night after the battle the rain fell incessantly, and the wounded lay untended on the hill slopes. On the 17th Soult still seemed in doubt whether to fall on again, and Beresford, though with sorely shrunken numbers, kept his position on the hill. Part of the fourth division, however, came up by a forced march from Jerumenha, and on the 18th Soult retreated, leaving many of his wounded to fall into the hands of the British.

The fight of Albuera lasted four hours, and the slaughter may be judged by the fact that within the space of a few acres some 7000 dead bodies, French, English, and Spanish, lay heaped. No less than 4407 British fell, out of a total of 6500 British soldiers actually engaged. Of the Buffs, who went into the fight with 24 officers and 750 rank and file, only 5 officers and 35 privates answered their names at roll-call the next morning. The colours of the



57th were pierced with thirty bullets; those of the 7th Fusiliers were torn to rags and the staff shot to fragments. "I think this action," said Wellington, "one of the most glorious and honourable to the character of the troops of any that has been fought during the war."

Soult's complaint against the British is perhaps a more splendid compliment than even Wellington's praise. "They could not be persuaded," he grumbled, "that they were beaten." "They were bad soldiers," he said again; "they were completely beaten. The day was mine. And yet they did not know it and would not run." According to French historians, the fatal day of Albuera exerted ever afterwards a great and disastrous influence upon the spirit of the French soldiers. These old warriors, always, heretofore, conquerors in the North of Europe, and often in Spain, no longer approached the English but with a secret feeling of distrust. The stern obstinacy of Houghton's regiments, the terrible charge of the Fusiliers, in a word, coloured the French imagination for the rest of the war!

Badajos was now again invested, but Soult and Marmont were quickly in movement to relieve it, and the siege, urged with signal courage but with absurdly inadequate appliances, was once more raised. Wellington checked the advance of Soult by again offering battle at Albuera, but the French general had no mind to try his fortunes twice on that ill-

omened field. Late in June, when Marmont, Soult, and Drouet had combined their forces, making a formidable army of 70,000 men, including 10,000 cavalry, Wellington, with less than 60,000 men, offered battle afresh on the Caya. The French generals, however, deemed the risk of a battle too great, and mere want of supplies compelled them to break up their combination, Soult falling back to Seville, Marmont to Salamanca. Early in September Wellington blockaded Ciudad Rodrigo. This was more for the sake of compelling Marmont to concentrate his plundering columns, thus relieving Galicia and Navarre, than with any real expectation of capturing so strong a fortress. On September 22, accordingly, Marmont and Dorsenne, with their combined forces of 60,000 men, were within ten miles of Ciudad; Wellington, with less than 45,000 men, was standing ready for battle within his lines. Marmont found Wellington's front too formidable to be attacked. There lay on the imagination of his soldiers, like a paralysing spell, the memories of Busaco, of Fuentes, of Albuera. Marmont's tactics, however, led to one of the most brilliant cavalry fights of the war.

On September 25, a French column, consisting of fourteen battalions of infantry, 30 squadrons of cavalry, and 12 guns, under Montbrun, attempted to seize the hill of El Bodon, held by the 77th, a battalion of the 5th, and a Portuguese regiment,

with two squadrons of German Hussars and two of the 11th Light Dragoons. The French cavalry, splendid and daring horsemen, rode straight up the hill heedless of the musketry fire of the infantry, but as they reached its summit, blown with their gallop, they were charged again and again by the German Hussars and the British Light Dragoons. Fully a score of times the British cavalry, riding in with loose reins and bloody spurs, drove the French horsemen, four times their own number, down the hill, and the men apparently enjoyed the operation. "I can personally attest," says Sir Charles Stewart, "that the single source of anxiety experienced by the officers in command arose from the fear lest these brave fellows should follow the broken multitudes down the cliffs and precipices into which they drove them." A French cavalry regiment captured two Portuguese guns, whereupon Ridge of the 5th, a gallant soldier, charged the French cavalry with his infantry, and retook the guns, with the bayonet. The spectacle of an infantry regiment deliberately charging cavalry is rare in war.

Sir Charles Stewart tells the story of the gallant deed performed by the 5th. They were ordered to recover the guns which had fallen into the hands of the French cavalry. "They marched up in line," he says, "and firing with great coolness; when at the distance of only a few paces from their adversaries, they brought their bayonets to the



charging position and rushed forward. I believe this is the first instance on record of a charge with the bayonet being made upon cavalry by an infantry battalion in line; nor, perhaps, would it be prudent to introduce the practice into general use. But never was charge more successful. Possessing the advantage of ground, and keeping in close and compact array, the 5th literally pushed their adversaries down the hill; they then re-took the guns, and, limbering them to the horses, which had followed their advance, drew them off in safety."

Montbrun, however, was not to be denied. His force was overwhelming; reinforcements were coming up but slowly, and the British and Portuguese had to fall back. Colville, who was in command, sent the Portuguese in advance, formed in a steady square; the 5th and 75th were so reduced in numbers that they had to combine to form a second square; and these two moving patches of steadfast infantry had to cross six miles of plain with Montbrun's triumphant cavalry thundering on them from every side. One of the British squares was assailed on three faces at the same moment; it was a duel betwixt the sabre of the horsemen and the bayonet of the infantry! Picton presently brought up the 45th, the 74th, and the 88th regiments, and took command of the whole movement. Montbrun, with 15 squadrons of cavalry, tried to detain the steadily moving battalions till his own infantry and guns



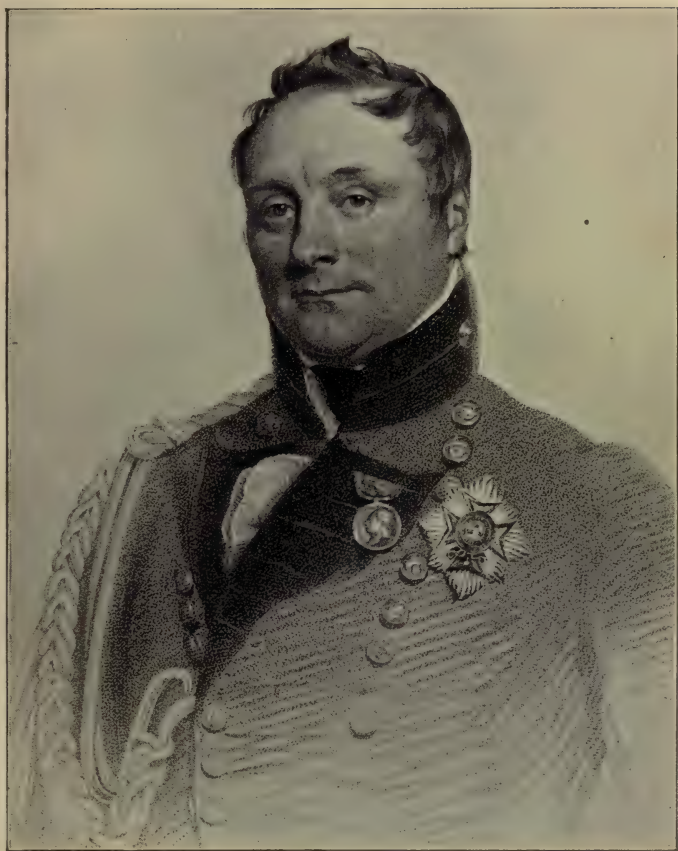
came up. One battery of six guns, indeed, was already in action, pouring a cruel fire of grape and canister into the solid ranks of the English squares. When the French horse were not in actual charge, the British infantry fell into columns for the sake of speed; and it needed cool judgment to choose the moment when the column, at the word of command, crystallised into a square, against whose faces the galloping horsemen hurled themselves in vain. At one time the squadrons of eager horsemen were riding within half pistol-shot of the columns. "Picton took off his hat, and, holding it over his eyes as a shade from the sun, looked sternly but anxiously at the French. The clatter of the horses and the clanking of the scabbards were so great when the right half squadron moved up, that many thought it the forerunner of a general charge. Some mounted officer called out, 'Had we not better form square?' 'No,' replied Picton, 'it is but a ruse to frighten us.'" In spite of Montbrun's daring and incessant charges, the British regiments reached Guinaldo unbroken.

On September 29 Wellington offered battle on the banks of the Coa to Marmont, but in vain, and on the 30th Marmont and Dorsenne, driven by the difficulty of securing supplies, had to separate their forces. The truth is that all the later stages of the campaign of 1811 were shaped and coloured by the recollections of Albuera. Thrice Wellington offered

battle to forces superior to his own, and thrice the French refused to accept the risks of a contest with Wellington's iron infantry.

Albuera represents a battle won, not by the brains of the general, but by the valour of the men in the ranks. But the campaign of 1811 closes with a brilliant stroke of soldiership, in which the general's brain did more even than the private soldier's bayonet to secure victory.

Hill, with his division, was keeping watch on Badajos and guarding against any irruptions from Estremadura, while Castanos was reorganising the broken Spanish army. Soult despatched Girard with 5000 men, of whom 1000 were cavalry, to disperse Castanos' levies, and Wellington, in turn, instructed Hill to suppress Girard. Girard, an active and enterprising general, highly esteemed by Napoleon, evaded Hill with much skill, but on October 27 Hill learnt that his enemy was encamped at Arroyo de Molinos, a village on the spur of the Sierra de Montaches. By a forced march, Hill reached Alcuescar, within four miles of Girard's position, and prepared to leap on the unsuspecting Frenchman. Hill managed his surprise with great skill. The light companies were thrown as a screen round the village to prevent news of Hill's presence leaking through to the enemy. No fire was lit. It was a wild night, with furious winds and splashing rain, but the patient troops stood in the darkness,



LORD HILL





while the tempest beat on them, till the order to move was given. No bugle-note or roll of drum gave the signal. The men moved off to a whispered command, climbed the mountain paths in silence, and, just as the skies were growing grey, found themselves within half a mile of Arroyo. A tempest of hail was sweeping over the landscape; and, as it happened, was blowing in the line of the march towards Arroyo, and the French pickets had turned their backs to the tempest.

The British thus reached the entrance to the village without being discovered. Hill, in appearance and temper, was a cross betwixt an English squire and a village rector. His look was fatherly, his temper gentle, but behind this placid face there was the spirit of a fine and gallant soldier. He was perhaps Wellington's most trusted lieutenant. "Hill," said Wellington, "may be always depended upon to do nothing more and nothing less than he is ordered to do." But when, on that October morning, Hill found Girard within his grasp, the unconscious French beginning to form for their march in entire ignorance that the heads of the British columns were within striking distance, all the calm of the English general's manner vanished. His sword flashed in his hand; he gave a loud "Hurrah!" and, spurring his horse, led the rush of the first brigade into the village; the Highlanders, with that touch of grim humour to which the bagpipe lends itself, playing "Hey, Johnnie Cope, are you wauking yet?" as they

charged. The second brigade had gained the exit from the village, and, before the rush of the 71st and the 92nd, the half-gathered French were swept away, and their cannon and baggage captured. With the readiness of veterans, the French tried to form themselves into squares, but every attempt at formation was wrecked. At last they broke; muskets and knapsacks were thrown off, and in scattered groups the French clambered up the steep flank of the Sierra de Montaches.

Hill's troops had marched through rain and mist all night, but at this scene they forgot their toils. The whole spectacle was a jest to them; "they laughed, shouted, jumped in their heavy accoutrements," says Hill's biographer, "or caught the scrambling horses of the fugitives who could not ride them over the mountain." The French killed numbered 500; nearly 1500 prisoners were taken, including a general, a colonel of cavalry, and thirty-five lieutenant-colonels, captains, &c. Prince d'Arenburg, who commanded the 27th Chasseurs, made a gallant effort to escape, riding at speed through the village. But a corporal of the 71st, standing singly with charged bayonet in the road, stopped the rider and made him prisoner. Girard was wounded, but managed to escape, only to be arrested by Soult, who reported him to Bonaparte. Girard's force was completely destroyed, and it was shown that an English general could perform a feat of swifter and more adroit soldiership than even one of Napoleon's choicest officers.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A CAMPAIGN OF SIEGES

THE power of Napoleon may be said to have reached its highest point at the beginning of 1812. He had shattered in turn every combination of the Great Powers of Europe; he had entered in succession almost every European capital as a conqueror. The mere recital of his victories has a sound like the roll of drums. Russia and Austria had joined with England in the effort to check his masterful rule in 1805; Russia and Prussia in 1806; Austria and Spain in 1809. But all was vain. Coalitions crumbled like houses of cards at the touch of Napoleon's sword. He made and unmade kings at pleasure. He rearranged empires to suit his ambition. "All Europe's bound-lines"—to quote Mrs. Browning—were "drawn afresh in blood" at his will.

A map of Central Europe in 1812 shows that Napoleonic France stretched from the North Sea to the Adriatic, from Brest to Rome, from Bayonne to Lübeck. The 85 departments of France had grown to 130. Rome, Cologne, and Hamburg were French cities, and a girdle of dependent States almost



doubled the actual area of the French Empire. Napoleon himself was king of Italy; Murat, his brother-in-law, the son of an innkeeper, was king of Naples; Joseph was king of Spain; Louis, of Holland. The Confederation of the Rhine, the Helvetic Republic, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, were but idle titles that served as labels for fragments of the empire of Napoleon. England, Russia, Turkey, and Scandinavia alone escaped his sway. But Russia was his ally and accomplice; Turkey and Scandinavia were mere dishes waiting to be devoured. There remained, in fact, only England—proud, solitary, unsubdued!

And yet 1812 is the year which marks the beginning of Napoleon's downfall—a downfall swifter and more wonderful than even his amazing rise. When Massena drew sullenly back from the lines of Torres Vedras, it was the ripple which marks the turn of an ocean-tide. French conquests had reached their farthest limits, and 1812 brought the two movements which, combined, overthrew Napoleon. It brought the war with Russia and the advance into Spain of Wellington. Three days after Wellington crossed the Agueda on his march to Salamanca—the victory which was to shake French power in Spain to its very base—Napoleon crossed the Niemen in that fatal march to Moscow which was within six months to wreck his reputation, destroy his whole military strength, and shake his throne to its fall.



Wellington's advance into Spain marked an essential change in the character of the Spanish struggle. It was no longer a defensive war, maintained by an unknown general against troops and marshals confident of victory. It was a war in which, at last, emerges a captain whose fame was to rival that of Napoleon, and whose strategy was to drive the soldiers and generals of France in hopeless ruin out of Spain.

The pride of Napoleon himself never soared higher than at the opening of the war with Russia. He was beginning, he dreamed, a campaign which would overwhelm all his enemies in one vast and final defeat. "Spain," said Napoleon to Fouché, "will fall when I have annihilated the English influence at St. Petersburg. I have 800,000 men, and to one who has such an army Europe is but an old prostitute who must obey his pleasure. . . . I must make one nation out of all the European States, and Paris must be the capital of the world." The war, in a word, was but "the last act in the drama"—the great drama of his career. It is interesting to learn that, in his own judgment, Napoleon was thus aiming at London when he began his march to Moscow; and he so misread facts as to believe he was overthrowing Spain when routing Cossacks beyond the Niemen.

As a matter of fact, Napoleon was committing the blunder which was to cost him his crown.

When his many columns crossed the Niemen in June, they seemed a force which, in scale of discipline and equipment, with Napoleon for captain, might well conquer the world. Five months afterwards, a handful of ragged, frost-bitten, hunger-wasted fugitives, flying before the Cossack spears, they recrossed the Niemen. The greatest army the world had seen had perished in that brief interval! In his Moscow campaign Napoleon was contending not so much with human foes as with the hostile forces of nature. His army perished in a mad duel with frost and ice and tempest, with hunger and cold and fatigue. Not the sharpness of Cossack spears or the stubborn courage of Russian squares overthrew Napoleon; but the cold breath of the frozen North, the far-stretching wastes of white snow, across which, faint with hunger, his broken columns stumbled in dying thousands.

But there were two fields of battle—Spain and Russia; and the war with Russia gave Wellington his opportunity in Spain. Napoleon starved his forces in that country to swell his Russian host. In 1811 there were 372,000 French troops with 52,000 horses in Spain. But in December 1811, 17,000 men of the Imperial Guard were withdrawn. By the beginning of 1812 some 60,000 veterans had marched back through the Pyrenees, and their places were taken by mere conscripts. Some of the best French generals, too, were summoned to the

side of Napoleon, and Wellington found himself confronted by leaders whose soldiership was inferior to his own. So 1812 marks the development of a new type of war on the part of the great English captain. He had, it is true, difficulties sufficient to wreck the courage of an ordinary general, and he had still to taste of great disasters. His troops were ill fed, ill clad, and wasted with sickness. Their pay was three months in arrear. The horses of his cavalry were dying of hunger. He had not quite 55,000 men, including Portuguese, fit for service. He was supported by a weak and timid Cabinet in England. His Spanish allies were worthless. Human speech has hardly resources sufficient to describe the follies and the treacheries of the assemblies which pretended to govern Spain and Portugal. Yet, under these conditions, and with such forces and allies, Wellington framed a subtle and daring plan for seizing the two great frontier fortresses, Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos, and for beginning an audaciously aggressive campaign against the French in Spain.

Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos stand north and south of the Tagus, which flows equidistant betwixt them. If we imagine an irregular triangle, of which Lisbon is the apex; one side running due west 120 miles long, reaches to Badajos; another side running north-west for 180 miles stretches to Ciudad Rodrigo; the base from Ciudad Rodrigo to Badajos



is 100 miles. It is plain that Lisbon is easily threatened from both these fortresses, and both were held by the French. To make Lisbon safe, and to make an advance into Spain possible, both must be captured. Yet the feat seemed impossible. Wellington had scarcely any battering train. Marmont, with an army of 65,000, was almost within sound of the guns of Ciudad Rodrigo. The least sign of movement towards Badajos would fetch Soult up from Andalusia in overpowering strength. The problem for the English general was to snatch two great fortresses, strongly held, from under the very hand of two mighty armies, each equal to his own in strength.

This was the feat which by foresight, audacity, and the nicest calculation of time, Wellington accomplished. His preparations were so profoundly hidden that they remained unsuspected. Hill was, of all Wellington's commanders, exactly the one who, when detached, kept all French generals within fifty miles of him on the alert; and by keeping Hill in movement on the Guadiana, Wellington fixed French attention on that quarter. Marmont was lulled into drowsy security. His columns were scattered over a wide area; the scene of action seemed to lie in the west. Ciudad Rodrigo was apparently forgotten by both sides. Then suddenly Wellington, to borrow Napier's words, "jumped with both feet on the devoted fortress!"



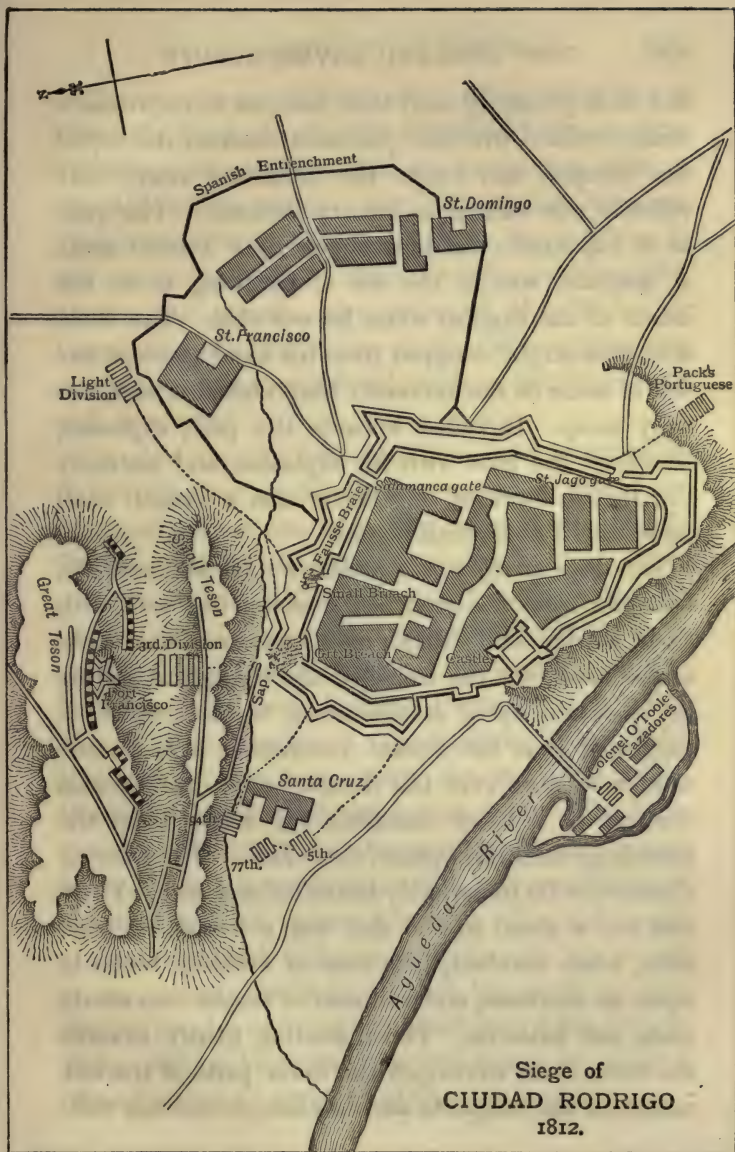
Ciudad Rodrigo was the great frontier *place d'armes* for the French. The siege equipage and stores of two armies lay in it. It was strongly held, under a very able commander, Barre; but its best defence lay in the certainty that Marmont would instantly advance to its succour. But Wellington calculated that it would take twenty-four days for Marmont in full force to appear for the relief of the place, and within that period he reckoned Ciudad Rodrigo could be carried. But the siege must be fierce, vehement, audacious. Wellington, as a matter of fact, outran even his own arithmetic. He captured Ciudad Rodrigo in twelve days.

The feature of the famous siege is the swift succession, the unfaltering certainty of each stroke in it. Never before was a besieged city smitten with strokes so furious, and following one another with such breathless speed.

In shape Ciudad Rodrigo roughly resembles a triangle with the angles truncated. At the base of the triangle runs the Agueda, making a vast and flowing ditch along the south-western front. Opposite the northern angle are parallel rocky ridges, called the Upper and the Lower Teson. The upper and farther ridge was within 600 yards of the city ramparts; the lower and nearer Teson was only 180 yards distant, and was crowned by a powerful redoubt called Francisco. The nights were black, the weather

bitter; the snow lay thick on the rocky soil, the river was edged with ice, and the bitter winter gales scuffled wildly over the ramparts of Ciudad Rodrigo. So wild was the weather that Picton himself, the hardiest of men, says of the day when the troops approached the city, "It was the most miserable day I ever witnessed: a continuous snowstorm, the severity of which was so intense that several men of the division perished of cold and fatigue." "The garrison," says Kincaid, "did not seem to think we were in earnest; for a number of their officers came out under the shelter of a stone wall within half musket-shot, and amused themselves in saluting and bowing to us in ridicule." Before next morning some of these very officers were British prisoners!

The 1st, 3rd, and Light Divisions formed the attacking force, but they had to encamp beyond the Agueda, and to ford that river, crisp and granulated with ice, every time they marched into the trenches, where the men remained on duty for twenty-four hours in succession. Wellington attacked from the two Tesons. He broke ground on the night of January 8, and the same night stormed the redoubt on the Lower Teson. Colborne led six companies from the Light Division to the assault. The men went forward at a run. Part swept round the redoubt and hewed their way through the gate; part raced up the glacis and scrambled over the counter-scarp. They found the palisades to be within three





feet of it, promptly used their fascines to improvise a bridge, walked over the palisades, reached the top of the parapet, and swept the defenders away. The redoubt was carried in twenty minutes! The gate, as it happened, was burst open by a French shell. A sergeant was in the act of throwing it on the heads of the English when he was shot. The shell, with fuse alight, dropped from his hand amongst the feet of some of the garrison: they kicked it energetically away. It rolled towards the gate, exploded, shattered the gate with its explosion, and instantly the British stormed in. Never was a French shell more useful to English plans!

Ten days of desperate artillery duel followed, the batteries from the trenches crushing the walls with their stroke, while fifty great guns from the walls roared back into the trenches, and the sound, rolling in far-heard, dying echoes along the hill summits, suggested that the distant mountains, says Napier, were mourning over the doomed city. Sir Charles Stewart in a letter describes the scene when the breaching batteries opened their fire. "The evening chanced to be remarkably beautiful and still. There was not a cloud in the sky, nor a breath of wind astir, when suddenly the roar of artillery broke in upon its calmness, and volumes of smoke rose slowly from our batteries. These, floating gently towards the town, soon enveloped the lower parts of the hill, and even the ramparts and bastions, in a dense veil;



whilst the towers and summits, lifting their heads above the haze, showed like fairy buildings, or those unsubstantial castles which are sometimes seen in the clouds on a summer day. The flashes from our guns were answered promptly from the artillery in the place, the roar of their thunder reverberating among the remote mountains of the Sierra de Francisca, with the rattle of the balls against the masonry, and the occasional crash as portions of the wall gave way."

On January 19 two breaches were practicable, and Wellington, sitting on the reverse of one of the advanced approaches, wrote the orders for the attack. Those pencilled sentences, written to the sullen accompaniment of the bellowing cannon, sealed the fate of Ciudad Rodrigo! The main breach was to be assaulted by Picton's division, "the Fighting Third." Mackinnon led one brigade, Campbell the other. The light companies of the division, under Major Manners of the 74th, were the storming party. Mackie of the 88th led the forlorn hope. The Light Division was to attack the smaller breach, George Napier leading a storming party of 300 men, Gurwood a forlorn hope of twenty-five men. The light company of the 83rd, with some Portuguese troops, was to attack an outwork in front of the castle, so as to destroy the fire of two guns which swept the breach; Pack, with a Portuguese brigade, was to make a feigned attack on the gate of St. Jago.

From the great breach, 100 feet wide, ran a steep incline of rugged stones. It was strewn with bombs and hand-grenades; two guns swept it with grape; a great mine pierced it beneath. It was a mere rugged pathway of death.

The winter night closed in early. Darkness lay on Ciudad Rodrigo like a pall. The British trenches were silent. The fortress rose massive and frowning in the gloom, the breaches showing like shadows cast on its wall. A gun was to give the signal for the attack, but the men waiting for its sound grew impatient. A sudden shout broke out on the right of the English attack. It was accepted as the signal, and ran, a tumult of exultant sound, along the zigzag of the trenches. The stormers for the great breach leaped out; the columns followed hard on them. The black face of the fortress broke into darting flames, and in a moment the air was filled with the tumult of the assault.

The rush at the great breach may be first followed. "Picton's men" were quick and fierce in their onfall. The stormers, in a rush which lasted a few breathless instants, reached the ditch, and, with a shout, they leapt into its black depths. The men, on each other's shoulders, or on the hastily-erected ladders, clambered up the farther face, and raced up the rough slope of the breach towards where, in the darkness, a bar of darting musketry fire showed, and guarded, the gap in the ramparts. As the men

scrambled over the broken stones, these seemed to burst into flame under their tread. The exploding hand-grenades pricked the rough slope with darting fire-points. But nothing could stop the rush of the British. They reached the breach, they swept up it, the French were thrust fiercely back. They clung for a few moments with fiery courage to the retrenchments which barred the head of the breach: two French guns, worked with frantic energy, poured blasts of grape, at pistol-shot distance, into the swaying masses of the storming column. With a desperate effort the attacking party at last broke through. But at that moment the mine under the breach was exploded, and Mackinnon with his foremost stormers were instantly slain. Yet the reckless soldiers swarmed up again, and the fight swayed backward and forward as the attack or the defence in turn seemed to prevail.

According to one account, the attack at the great breach broke through just as the men who had carried the smaller breaches came up and took its defenders in flank. Mackie, who led the forlorn hope of the 3rd division, struggled through the *mêlée* up the crest of the breach, leaped from the rampart into the town, and there discovered that the trench which isolated the breach was cut clean through the wall. He climbed up to the breach again, forced his way through the tumult and the fire, gathered a cluster of men, led them through



the deep trench as through a ditch, and was thus the first man who reached the streets of the town from the main breach. The appearance of his group of redcoats in the streets, the men of the Light Division coming up at the same moment, made the French yield the breach.

When the summit of the breach was gained, it was found to be so deeply entrenched that, to quote Jones, the stormers "had to jump down a wall 16 feet in depth, at the foot of which had been ranged a variety of impediments, such as iron crows' feet, iron *chevaux-de-frise*, iron spikes fixed vertically, the whole being encircled with the means of maintaining a barrier of burning combustibles." The parapet was gapped with two lateral trenches. They were ten feet deep and ten feet wide, but, by accident, a plank the besieged had used for the purpose of crossing one of these trenches was left, with one end at the bottom of the ditch, the other resting on the lip of the trench next to the breach. This was promptly dragged up, thrust across the trench, and used as a bridge. Across the second trench the stormers also found a single plank left, and Campbell led the rush over it. While he was on the plank a French officer calling on his men to fire, sprang forward, and made a lunge at Campbell. Campbell parried, and in a moment was across the ditch. So swift, so fierce was the impetus of the attack that, to quote the words of an actor in the



strife, "Five minutes had not elapsed from the regiments quitting the shade of the convent wall before a lodgment was made in the town, and the majority of the garrison had thrown down their arms—many never having had time to take them."

At the smaller breach a fight as gallant was raging. Wellington was in the act of giving his final instructions to George Napier, who was to lead the storming party of the Light Division against this breach, when the men of the 3rd, anticipating the signal, leaped out, and the assault on the great breach began in the manner described. Napier has left a graphic record of the doings of that night. He had been allowed to select his own storming party, and, halting the three regiments which formed the Light Division, as they were on their way to relieve the trenches, he called for 100 volunteers from each regiment. The entire division instantly stepped forward, and the trouble was to select 300 stormers out of 1500 soldiers, all claiming that perilous honour. Napier himself, with an odd premonition of what would happen, arranged with a surgical friend to be on hand during the assault for the purpose of amputating his arm, as he was sure he would lose it; a service which was duly rendered. With cool judgment Napier forbade his men to load; they must win the breach with the bayonet. While Wellington himself was pointing out the breach to Napier, a staff officer discovered the unloaded condition of the muskets in

the storming party, and demanded "Why don't you make your men load?" "If we don't do the business with the bayonet without firing," answered Napier, "we shall not do it at all; so I shall not load;" and, says Napier, "I heard Wellington, who was close by, say, 'Let him alone; let him go his own way.'"

Napier believed in silence as well as in steel. He sternly forbade his men to shout, and swiftly, but without a sound, the stormers of the Light Division doubled forward. The ditch, 300 yards distant, was reached, and, in spite of its depth and blackness, crossed without a pause. The stormers clambered up its farther face, and raced up the breach, the French firing fast on them. A grape-shot smashed Napier's arm, whirling his body round with the impact of the blow, and he fell. At the fall of their leader the stormers stopped for a moment, lifted their muskets, forgetting they were empty, towards the gap above, and then came the sound of 300 muskets all idly snapped at once! "Push on with the bayonet, men!" shouted Napier. The men broke into a deep-voiced hurrah, ran forward again, their front narrowed to a couple of files. They had to climb, with stumbling feet, to the very muzzles of the steadily-firing French; but nothing could stop the men of the Light Division. A 24-pounder was placed across the actual gap in the ramparts to bar it; but the stormers leaped over it, the column followed. The 13th, according to orders, wheeled to

the right, so as to take the defenders of the great breach, where the fight was still raging, in flank, the 52nd cleared the ramparts to the left, and Ciudad Rodrigo was won, the governor surrendering his sword to the youthful lieutenant who led the stormers of the Light Division.

Then followed wild scenes. The men were mad with the passion of the fight and the exultation of victory. There was keen hatred of the Spanish in the British ranks. They had not forgotten the sufferings of the Talavera campaign, and how their wounded were allowed to starve to death, or were abandoned to the French by the Spaniards after that battle. Ciudad Rodrigo was practically sacked by British soldiers, for the moment broken loose from all restraint, and these excesses blacken the fame of the great siege.

The capture of Ciudad Rodrigo cost Wellington nearly 1300 men and officers, of whom one half fell on the breaches on the night of the assault. Craufurd, the stern and famous leader of the Light Division, was struck down at the head of his men. The storming-party stood formed under the wall, and Craufurd, who led them in person, turned, faced the cluster of desperate spirits he was to lead, and spoke a few words to them. His voice had always a singular carrying note; but on this occasion the men noticed an unusual depth and range in its tones. He was speaking his last words! "Now,



lads, for the breach!" he added, and moved quickly forward. Craufurd himself, with unfaltering step, advanced straight to the crest of the glacis; then, turning, with his keen high voice he shouted instructions to the shot-tormented column of the stormers. He himself stood, a solitary figure, the centre of a furious storm of musketry fire. From the rampart, almost within touch, a double rank of French infantry was shooting fiercely and fast. Presently a bullet struck Craufurd on the side, tore through his lungs and lodged near the spine. It was a mortal wound, and, as his aide-de-camp, Shaw Kennedy, stooped over him, the dying soldier charged him with a last message to his wife. He was quite sure, she was to be told, that they would meet in heaven!

He was buried in the breach his men had carried—a fitting sepulchre for so stern a soldier.

Gleig has left a striking picture of the scene at Craufurd's funeral. His body was borne by six sergeants of the Light Division, with Wellington, Beresford, and a cluster of general officers as mourners. The coffin was carried up the rugged breach itself, a rough grave having been dug in its stony heart for the gallant soldier who died upon it. When the coffin was laid on the edge of this strange grave, Gleig says that he saw the tears running down the stern faces of the rugged veterans of the Light Division as they stood in silent ranks around.



Craufurd had his limitations as a soldier. He was stern, fierce, passionate, and of a valour which always scorned, and sometimes fatally violated, prudence. It is of Craufurd's obstinate valour in the fight—a valour that made him so fiercely reluctant to fall back in the presence of any odds—that a familiar story is told. Wellington, when Craufurd at last came up, said, "I am glad to see you safe, Craufurd." "Oh!" responded Craufurd coolly, "I was in no danger, I assure you." "But I was from your conduct," replied Wellington. Upon which Craufurd observed in an audible aside, "He is ——— crusty to-day!"

It was Craufurd again—not Picton—who told a remiss commissary that if provisions for his regiment were not up in time he would hang him! The aggrieved commissary complained to Wellington. "Did General Craufurd go as far as that?" said Wellington, "did he actually say he would hang you?" "Yes, my lord, he did," replied the almost tearful commissary. "Then," was Wellington's unexpected comment, "I should strongly advise you to get the rations ready; for if General Craufurd said he would hang you, by G— he will do it!"

Mackinnon, who commanded a brigade of Picton's division, was slain on the great breach. He was a leader greatly beloved by his Highlanders. There was in him a touch of the high-minded chivalry of Sir Philip Sidney added to the fire of Scottish

valour. He, too, found at first a grave in the rugged and bloody slope where he fell; but the officers of the Coldstream Guards afterwards laid him in a statelier, but not a nobler, grave at Espega.

It is curious to note that after the capture of Rodrigo a number of British deserters—ten from the Light Division alone—were found in the garrison. They had fought desperately against their countrymen in that wild night of the assault. Most of them were shot, after trial by court-martial.

The capture of Ciudad Rodrigo is a memorable stage in the fortunes of the Peninsular War. It marks the beginning of that chain of almost unbroken victories which stretches to Waterloo. Wellington had accomplished with 40,000 men in twelve days, and in the depth of winter, what took Massena in 1810, with 80,000 men, and in the height of summer, more than a month to accomplish. "Whether viewed in its conception, arrangements, or execution," the capture of Ciudad Rodrigo, says Jones, in his "Journal of Sieges," "must be ranked as one of the happiest, boldest, and most creditable achievements in our military annals." Perhaps the best testimony to the splendour of the deed is found in the astonished explanations of it offered by the French. On January 16 Marmont announced he was about to set out with 60,000 men to relieve Ciudad Rodrigo. "You may expect events," he added, "as fortunate and as glorious for the French

army." But on the 19th Ciudad had fallen. "There is something so incomprehensible in this," he wrote to the Emperor, "that I allow myself no observation!" Napoleon, on his part, allowed himself a good many "observations" on the event, and of a kind very unsatisfactory to the generals to whom they were addressed!

On the morning after the assault Picton came up to the 88th as it was falling into line. A soldier shouted to him as the grim-faced Picton rode by, "General, we gave you a cheer last night; it's your turn now." Picton took off his hat with a laugh, and said, "Here, then, you drunken set of brave rascals! Hurrah! we'll soon be at Badajos!" The men shouted and slung their firelocks: the band broke into music, and, with a quick step, the regiment moved off to the yet wilder and more desperate assault on the castle at Badajos.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE TALE OF BADAJOS

AFTER the fall of Ciudad Rodrigo Marmont drew back to Valladolid to wait for Wellington's next move. The British general handed the captured city over to the Spaniards, by whose careless hands it was perilously neglected, and himself returned to Gallegos, there to mature his plans for a rush on Badajos. The French marshals, fluttered by Wellington's bold stroke, were keenly on the alert; and Marmont, to do him justice, suspected that Badajos would next be attacked. Napoleon, however, laughed at the idea. "You must suppose the English mad," he wrote, "to imagine they will march on Badajos leaving you at Salamanca; that is leaving you in a situation to get to Lisbon before them." Yet it was exactly this heroic "madness" which Wellington contemplated. He resolved to invest the place during the second week in March, when the flooded rivers would make it difficult for the French columns to concentrate for its relief. Meanwhile he covered his preparations with a mask of profoundest secrecy.

The guns for the siege were shipped at Lisbon



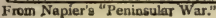
for a fictitious destination, transhipped at sea into small craft, in which they were carried up the river Sadao, thence by bullock-trains through unfrequented routes to Badajos. The hunger-wasted bullocks, however, proved unequal to the task of dragging all the guns to the front, and the siege train was hopelessly inadequate. Some light guns were borrowed from the fleet, and stray pieces picked up in various quarters, making the most composite and utterly inadequate artillery train with which a great siege was ever undertaken. It included Spanish guns as old as the Armada, others that were cast in the reign of Philip III.; yet others in that of John IV. of Portugal. Wellington had to pay in the blood of his soldiers for the defects in his battering equipment. Badajos was commanded by Philippon, a soldier of high daring and of exhaustless artifice; its garrison, 5000 strong, was made up of detachments from the forces of Marmont, of Soult, and of Jourdan, so that the honour of three armies was pledged to its succour. Wellington employed the 3rd, the 4th, and the Light Divisions, and a brigade of Portuguese in the siege; Hill and Graham commanded the covering force.

Badajos stands on a rocky ridge, a spur of the Toledo range, just where the Rivillas runs almost at right angles into the Guadiana, and in the angle formed by their junction. The city is oval in shape, ringed with strong works, the Rivillas serving as a wet ditch to its east front, the Guadiana, 500 yards

wide, forbidding attack from the north; five great fortified outposts—St. Roque, Christoval, Picurina, Sardelifas, and a fortified bridge-head across the Guadiana, constituting the outer zone of its defences. The equinoctial rains were falling on Badajos when the siege began. The rivers were in flood; the ground was little better than a marsh; tempests were perpetually blowing. Yet, from the moment the siege began, the thunder of the attack never ceased. Wellington attacked the city at its south-eastern angle, where a curve of the Rivillas acted as a gigantic wet ditch. Here the Picurina, a formidable redoubt, with a ditch fourteen feet deep, and a rampart sixteen feet high, served as an outpost to the defences. Trenches were opened against the Picurina, but the business of forming trenches in earth of the consistency of liquid mud may be imagined, as well as the difficulty of placing and working guns under such conditions. On March 25, however, fire was opened on the Picurina; then, impatient of the feebleness of his artillery, Wellington resolved to carry the fort with the bayonet.

At nine o'clock that night 500 men of the 3rd division in three tiny columns, led respectively by Shaw of the 74th, Powis of the 83rd, and Rudd of the 77th, leaped from the trenches and dashed at the great redoubt. One column was launched at the face of the work, the flank columns assailed its rear and sides. The distance was short, the troops quick, but

Siege of  
**BADAJOS**  
1812.



*Walker & Boutall sc.*



the moment the men showed clear of the trenches the Picurina opened its fire, and every gun from Badajos that commanded their line of approach added its thunder to the tumult. The palisades were reached; some were hewn down, but the weight of the fire forbade the stormers entering through the gaps. On the face of the work there was a ledge half-way up its front; the stormers reached this, pulled up their ladders, re-erected them on the ledge, and struggled up them to the top of the parapet. Here the French met them gallantly, and in the light of the incessantly darting musketry there could be seen from the trenches the dark figures contending fiercely on the parapet. Kempt, who was in charge of the attack, now sent his reserves forward at a run; they reached the broken palisades, and stormed in, and the Picurina was carried. The fight lasted an hour. It had two armies as spectators, and the British loss in killed and wounded amounted to 316 out of 500 combatants.

With the capture of the Picurina the English were able to establish their breaching batteries within 300 yards of the body of the place, and for twelve days there raged a desperate duel betwixt the trenches and Badajos, maintained with the fiercest energy and accompanied with great slaughter. By April 6 three breaches were established; one in the face of the Trinidad bastion, one on the flank of the bastion of Santa Maria, and a third breach betwixt these two.



Soult was advancing fast for the relief of the city, and Wellington resolved to attack.

It was Easter Sunday, April 6. At half-past seven the breaching guns were to cease their fire and the attacking columns to leap from the trench. Later, the time for the assault was changed to ten o'clock, but no corresponding change of order was given to the breaching batteries; an apparently trivial, but in reality very tragical blunder. The guns ceased their thunder at half-past seven. Then followed two hours and a half of quietness, during which Phillipon was able undisturbed to cover the front of the breach with harrows, crows'-feet, grenades, &c., and to stretch across the gap in the parapet that terrible *chevaux-de-frise* of glittering sword-blades against which the stormers were to press their desperate bodies in vain. Had the breach, or its crest, been swept by a tempest of grape till the moment the stormers were let loose, the lives of many hundreds of gallant men would have been saved. It is said, however, the batteries lacked ammunition for such a fire—so inadequate were Wellington's resources for the siege!

If we omit two attacks which were mere feints, five great assaults were to be delivered on Badajos. Picton, with the 3rd division, was to cross the Rivillas, and escalade the castle. Leith, with the 5th division, was to attack the bastion of San Vincente, a powerful work against which no breaching shot had yet been fired. The Light Division, under Barnard, was to

attack the smaller breach in Santa Maria; the 4th division, under Colville, was to storm the great breach in the Trinidad, and a detachment of the 4th division was to carry the breach in the curtain between Santa Maria and the Trinidad.

Of these five attacks, perhaps that on the third breach was the easiest; and it was never made! The party detailed for its assault was caught in the tumult of the fight at the great breach, and the next morning, while the other two breaches were strewn thick from foot to summit with the bodies of the slain, not one fallen body lay on the third breach! Of the other four attacks, those on the castle and on San Vincente succeeded where success seemed impossible, and this decided the fate of the city. It is the paradox of the siege that, having formed three practicable breaches, after twenty days' battering, the assault succeeded at not one of the three. The city was escaladed, and carried at two other points deemed too strong for attack by gunfire, and against which not a cannon-shot had been discharged! The smaller breach in the flank of Santa Maria was assailed only for a few minutes and by an isolated party. The storming columns got mixed together, and the three separate attacks were melted into one—a confused, furious, long-sustained assault on the great breach, that failed—or, rather, that failed until the French were shaken by knowing that the castle had been carried, and were taken in the rear by the victorious stormers of San Vincente.

The escalade of the castle seemed a task beyond the power of human valour to accomplish. The castle stood on a rock 100 feet high; the walls rose to a height ranging from 18 feet to 24 feet; the crest of the parapet was lined with loaded shells, huge stones, logs of wood, &c., ready to be flung down on the attacking party. The soldiers holding the crest had each six muskets lying loaded by his side, they were furnished with long poles shod with iron, with which to thrust down the ladders. A fringe of steel and the flashes of rolling musketry volleys threatened death to the daring stormers as they clambered up their shaking ladders.

The men of the 3rd division were standing silent in the trenches waiting for the signal, yet half-an-hour distant, when a lighted carcass flung from the castle revealed the long line of waiting soldiers. Picton was to lead, but had not yet come to the front. Kempt, his second, a fine soldier, instantly took forward the division. The Rivillas had to be traversed by a narrow bridge which the musketry of the castle smote as with a whip of flame. The men crossed in single file, were re-formed under fire, and led up the rocky slope to the foot of the castle walls. Here Kempt fell, and, as he was carried back, met Picton, black with anger and furious with haste, hurrying to the front. The whole assault of Badajos by this time was let loose. Leith Hay at the western extremity was flinging himself on San Vincente, the



men of the Light Division and of the 4th were racing forward to the two breaches. Badajos, from every bastion, and from the long curving crest of its walls, was pouring out its fire. Surtees, who watched the scene from the quarries, says the darting flames were so bright and incessant that he could plainly see the faces of the defenders, though nearly a mile off! Yet against a fire so dreadful the stormers raced forward with reckless daring.

The men of the 3rd meanwhile had placed their ladders against the lofty walls of the castle, and were crowding up them. The shouts, the crackle of musketry, the roar of the guns, the sound of the crashing ladders as they were broken by the huge stones flung on them, the ring of steel against steel as the men on the ladders which yet stood strove to force their way on to the parapet, made the wildest tumult. Pakenham, Wellington's brother-in-law, who afterwards died in front of New Orleans, was one who reached the crest, only to be thrust down it with a bayonet stab. But the advantage was with the defenders, and for a moment the men of the 3rd drew back, broken but furious. "If we cannot win the castle," Picton cried wrathfully to his soldiers, "let us die upon the walls!" The men were reformed, and two officers, Colonel Ridge and an ensign named Cauch, seized a ladder and ran forward with it to a new spot, where the wall was slightly lower. Another ladder was brought to the same spot, the



men streamed furiously up, and the castle was won; but Ridge, with many another gallant soldier, died on the ramparts.

One of the first to mount was Lieutenant Macpherson of the 45th. On reaching the top of the ladder he found it still below the crest. According to his own story he "shouted directions to those below, and, pushing the head of the ladder from the wall, the men below, seizing its lowest rung, lifted him bodily to the summit." Here a French soldier deliberately put his musket against his body and fired. The ball struck a metal button on his coat and glanced off, but not without driving two fractured ribs in upon his lungs. Pakenham, who was next below him, tried to clamber past his wounded friend, but in vain; and at that moment the ladder broke. Macpherson lay long insensible at the foot of the wall, but recovered consciousness, clambered into the castle, and had the satisfaction of pulling down and capturing the French flag that flew above it.

Picton found that the gates which led from the castle into the town were walled up, and the slaughter amongst his own men had been so dreadful that for the moment he was content with holding the castle he had won, instead of breaking through to take the other breaches in flank.

Leith Hay, in his turn, had succeeded at San Vincente, and this, too, where success seemed impossible. The ditch was 6 feet deep, the scarp

30 feet high, the glacis mined, the parapet fringed with veterans. The Portuguese battalions, appalled by the fire poured upon them, flung down their ladders and fled. But the British caught up the ladders, broke through the palisade, leaped into the ditch—only to find the ladders too short! A mine was sprung under their feet, they were pelted with musketry from above, their ladders broken with huge stones. Yet the stubborn British persevered. At one spot the bastion was lower, and the ladders were replaced here. One soldier was thrust by his comrades up and over the crest, others followed, and the bastion was won.

The five assaults of that night were alike in heroism, but the tragedy of the struggle reached its climax at the great breach, or rather at the two breaches. The storming parties of the two columns raced side by side to the ditch, bags of hay were thrown into it to lessen its depth, ladders placed down the counterscarp, and in a moment the ditch was crowded with gallant soldiers. At that instant a mine beneath it was exploded: it became a sort of crater of flame in which perished, almost at a breath, hundreds of brave men. The red flame lit up for a moment the whole face of Badajos, with its crowded parapets and madly-working guns. The men of the Light Division, coming on at a run, reached the edge of the smoking ditch just after the explosion, and stood for an instant amazed at the

sight. "Then," says Napier, "with a shout that matched even the sound of the explosion, they leaped into it, and crowded up the breach." The 4th division came running up with equal fury to attack the middle breach, but the ditch was deep with water, and the first eager files that sprang into it were trodden down by their comrades, and "about a hundred of the Fusiliers, the men of Albuera," perished there. It illustrates the confusion of a night attack that the stormers of the Light Division were on the point of firing into an unseen body coming up on their flank, which proved to be the stormers of the 4th division, coming up at a run to join them.

In front of the Trinidad bastion itself the ditch was very wide, its centre occupied by a high unfinished ravelin. The men eagerly climbed up this, believing it to be the foot of the breach. They found instead there gaped before them, wide and black and deep, yet another ditch. They must leap into its dark and muddy depths and clamber up its farther side before reaching the real foot of the breach. That unhappy ravelin undoubtedly broke the rush of the stormers. The men gathered on its summit and began to fire back at the parapets. The Light Division, too, in the darkness and tumult, had mistaken its path. Its men crowded to the ravelin by the side of their comrades of the 4th division, and, in the noise and madness of the scene, it was impossible to withdraw the men



of the Light Division and lead them to their assigned point of attack.

The leaders of the attacking columns, leaping from the crowded ravelin into the farther ditch, led the right way up the breach; but it was impossible to re-form the columns, and set them in ordered and disciplined movement up its rough slope; and only by the momentum of a column in regular formation could the obstructions that barred the breach be swept aside. Here was the great *chevaux-de-frise*, set with sharpened sword-blades. Behind it was a triple rank of infantry firing swiftly. Loaded shells were rolled down amongst the English, guns from either flank smote them incessantly with grape. "Never," says Jones, in his history of the siege—"never since the discovery of gunpowder were men more seriously exposed to its action than those assembled in the ditch to assault the breaches. Many thousand shells and hand-grenades, numerous bags filled with powder, every kind of burning composition and destructive missile had been prepared, and placed behind the parapets of the whole front. These, under an incessant roll of musketry, were hurled into the ditch, without intermission, for upwards of two hours, giving its whole surface an appearance of vomiting fire, and producing occasional flashes of light more vivid than the day, followed by momentary utter darkness."

In that wild scene disciplined order had perished.



The impulse of attack had to be supplied by the daring of individual leadership, and this did not fail. Every other moment an officer would spring forward with a shout, and climb the breach; a swarm of gallant men would follow. They swept up the slope like leaves driven by a whirlwind; they seemed to shrivel in the incessantly-darting flames that streamed from the crest, they were driven back again like leaves caught in an eddy of the winds. Again and again, a score of times over, that human wave flung its spray upon the stony slope of the breach; and each time the wave sank back again; but the charging parties seldom numbered more than fifty at a time. For two hours that scene raged. The British, unable to advance and scorning to retreat, at last stood on the slope and crest of the ravelin or in the ditch below, leaning on their muskets and looking in sullen fury at the breach, while the French, shooting swiftly from the ramparts, asked tauntingly "why they did not come into Badajos." An officer who stood amongst the sullen groups in the ditch says, "I had seen severe fighting often, but nothing like this. We stood passively to be slaughtered."

Shaw Kennedy fixes on one British sergeant named Nicholas as the hero of the wild fight on the breach. "Nicholas," says Kennedy, "seemed determined to tear the sword-blades of the *chevaux-de-frise* from their fastenings, in which attempt he

long persevered while enveloped in an absolute stream of fire and bullets poured out against him by the defenders. Nicholas was the hero of the Santa Maria."

Wellington, his face sharpened and grey with anxiety, was watching the scene from an advanced battery, and he now ordered the division to fall back from the great breach, intending to re-form it, and attack afresh in the morning. But the men could not be brought to retreat. The buglers of the reserve were sent to the crest of the glacis to sound the retreat, but the men on the ravelin and in the ditch would not believe the signal was genuine, and struck their own buglers who attempted to repeat it. "I was near Colonel Barnard after midnight," says Kincaid, "when he received repeated messages from Lord Wellington to withdraw from the breach, and to form the division for a renewal of the attack at daylight; but, as fresh attempts continued to be made, and the troops were still pressing forward into the ditch, it went against his gallant soul to order a retreat while yet a chance remained. But, after heading repeated attempts himself, he saw that it was hopeless, and the order was reluctantly given about two o'clock in the morning. We fell back about 300 yards, and re-formed—all that remained to us."

A few men of the Light Division, under the leadership of Nicholas of the Engineers and Shaw of the

43rd, had found the breach in the Santa Maria bastion which their column was meant to carry. They were only about fifty in number, but Nicholas and Shaw led them with a rush up the ruins. Nicholas fell mortally wounded; well-nigh every man of the party was struck down, except Shaw. He stood alone, and taking out his watch, he declared it "too late to carry the breach that night," and walked down the breach again! Nicholas, who died of his wounds a few days afterwards, told the story of Shaw's amazing coolness.

Meanwhile Leith Hay's men from San Vincente were marching at speed across the town, through streets silent and empty, but lit as for a gala, with light streaming from the houses on either side. They fell in with some mules carrying ammunition to the great breach, and captured them, and then advanced to attack the defenders of the great breach from the rear. A battalion of the 38th, too, had advanced along the ramparts from San Vincente, and opened a flank fire on the breach. The French knew that the castle was lost, and, attacked both on flank and front, they gave way at the breach. The men of the 4th and of the Light Divisions were sent forward again. The breach was abandoned and Badajos was won!

For long, to Wellington and his staff watching from an advanced battery the fury of the assault, no cheerful news came. The red glare on the night



sky, the incessant roll of musketry, the wild shouts of the stormers, answered with vehement clamour from the walls, showed that success had not yet been won. But when the 44th had gained the ramparts of San Vincente its bugler sounded the advance. Wellington's quick ear caught through the tumult of the night that sound. "There is an English bugler in that tower," he said. This was the first hint of success which reached him; then came a messenger from the castle. It was Picton's aide-de-camp to tell of the place having been carried.

Five-sixths of the attacking party had fallen; of Picton's invincible soldiers little more than a scanty handful held the great castle, whose towering height and strength seemed to defy attack. Picton himself, after describing how his men lifted one another up till the wall was gained, added, "Yet I could hardly make myself believe that we had taken the castle." The news was sent to the men of the 4th and the Light Divisions after they had fallen back. No one at first would believe it, so incredible did it seem to the assailants of these impregnable breaches that any troops could have entered the place. The men and the officers were lying down in sullen exhaustion after their conflict, when a staff officer came up with the orders to immediately attack the breach afresh. "The men," says the "History of the Rifle Brigade," "leaped up, resumed their formation, and advanced



as cheerfully and as steadily as if it had been the first attack."

According to Costello, who took a gallant part in that wild scene, the first intimation the British stormers at the great breach had of Picton's success, was an exultant shout from within the town itself, followed by a cry in rich Irish brogue, "Blood and 'ounds! where's the Light Division? The town's our own! Hurrah!" The men of the triumphant 3rd division thus were calling across the breach to their comrades of the Light Division.

When they clambered the breach, passing over the hill of the dead, and reached the *chevaux-de-frise*, there was no resistance. There were no darting musketry flames to drive them back. Yet it was with difficulty they forced even the unguarded barrier!

When the soldiers at last broke through into Badajos, their passions were kindled to flame, and the scenes of horror and rapine which followed were wilder than even those at Ciudad Rodrigo. But there was an element of humour amid even the horrors of that wild night. "Wherever," says Kincaid, "there was anything to eat or drink, the only saleable commodities, the soldiers had turned the shopkeepers out of doors, and placed themselves regularly behind the counter, selling off the contents of the shop. By-and-by, another and a stronger party would kick those out in their turn, and there

was no end to the succession of self-elected shop-keepers."

In that wild night-struggle the British lost 3500 men, and most of these were slain within an area, roughly, of a few hundred yards square. It is said that Wellington broke into tears—the rare, reluctant tears of a strong man—as he looked on the corpse-strewn slope of the great breach.

Blakeney, who served with the 28th, describing the breach, says that "boards, fastened with ropes to plugs driven in the ground within the breach, were let down, and covered nearly the whole surface of the breach. These boards were so thickly studded with sharp-pointed spikes that one could not introduce a hand between them. They did not stick out at right angles to the board, but were all slanting upwards." In the rear of the breach thus covered with steel points, "the ramparts had deep cuts in all directions, like a tanyard, so that it required light to enable one to move safely through them, even when no fighting was going on." Only two British soldiers had actually forced their way through these dreadful obstacles, and reached the ramparts, where their bodies were found in the morning. Blakeney supplies one dreadful detail of the scene presented by the breach and its approaches on the morning after the fight. The water in the great ditch was literally turned crimson with the blood-shed of the night; and, as the sun smote it, the long

deep ditch took the appearance of "a fiery lake of smoking blood, in which lay the bodies of many British soldiers."

The siege only lasted twenty days, and its success proved more difficult of explanation to French marshals than even that of Ciudad Rodrigo. "Never," wrote Kellerman, "was there a place in a better state, better supplied, or better provided with troops. I confess my inability to account for its inadequate defence. All our calculations have been disappointed. Lord Wellington has taken the place, as it were, in the presence of two armies, amounting to 80,000 men." But the defence of Badajos was not inadequate. It was skilful and gallant in the highest degree. What explains the capture, in a time so brief, of a place so strong, and held with such skill and power, is the matchless valour of the British troops. The fire and swiftness of the siege, it may be added, outraced all the calculations of Marmont and Soult. Soult, in fact, only reached Villafranca, nearly forty miles from Badajos, on April 8, when he learnt to his amazement that the place had fallen!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### WELLINGTON AND MARMONT

THE capture of these two great fortresses gave Wellington an immense advantage. He was no longer dependent on Lisbon, but had secure bases on the Guadiana and the Agueda. He could, at will, smite the French armies in Spain, and menace alike the north, the south, the centre; and the French marshals stood uneasily on guard, expecting his stroke, but not able to guess where it would fall. Each marshal, too, was more concerned in guarding his own province than in assisting his neighbour. Marmont had fallen back to Salamanca, Soult was on the Guadalquiver. Wellington elected to strike at Marmont. His overthrow would lay Madrid open; and Soult, finding his communications with France threatened, must fall back in haste. A victory in Castile, that is, would deliver Andalusia.

But it was necessary to snap the chain of communication betwixt Marmont and Soult, and to isolate the latter general. The Tagus flowed betwixt these two commanders; and at Almaraz was the single bridge across the Tagus by which the two French





MARSHAL DE MARMONT

DUKE OF RAGUSA

*From an engraving after the painting by MANERET*



armies communicated with each other. So important was this bridge that it was guarded by three forts and a fortified bridge-head, armed with eighteen guns and held by a garrison of 1000 men. Wellington despatched his most enterprising leader, Hill, to leap upon the bridge and destroy it, thus breaking the link betwixt Soult and Marmont.

It was a daring feat. Hill had 6000 men and eighteen guns; with this modest force he had to thrust himself deep into a hostile country, storm the forts that guarded the bridge without waiting to breach their walls; and fall back with light-footed speed, lest he should be cut off and destroyed by overwhelming forces.

On May 12, Hill was across the Guadiana; on the 16th he was within a night's march of Almaraz. He formed his force into three columns—the right consisting of the 50th, 71st, and 92nd, under his own command; the centre under Long, the left under Chowne—and pushed forward in the darkness, intending to attack at the same moment Mirabete, a castle a league distant from the bridge, and serving as an outpost to it, and the forts guarding the bridge itself. The roads were bad, however, and day broke long before Almaraz was reached. Hill found, too, the road was so completely destroyed that it was impossible to take forward his guns. He must do the work with musket and bayonet only. His troops remained in the hills till the night of May 18. On

the next day Chowne began his attack on Mirabete before Hill's column had reached Fort Napoleon—a powerful redoubt standing on high ground and guarding the southern end of the bridge.

The sound of Chowne's musketry and the sight of the eddying white smoke rising above the trees gave the alarm to Fort Napoleon. Its garrison, crowded on the parapet, were gazing eagerly towards Mirabete; when suddenly two tiny red columns broke over the crest of the nearest hill. It was the 50th under Colonel Stewart, with a wing of the 71st; and at the double, with a proud and exultant shout, the men came on. The guns of Fort Napoleon broke hurriedly into fire; all round its crest the musketry flashed. Fort Ragusa, from the farther bank, added the thunder of its guns to the tumult. Never pausing, however, the British came on at a run, the leading files carrying ladders—the very ladders that had played a part in the assault of Badajos—for the escalade. The ladders proved far too short; but half way up the face of the wall was a broad ledge. The English clambered to this, dragged up their ladders—red with the blood of Badajos—re-erected them on the ledge, and broke with levelled bayonets over the parapet, the English and French all mixed together, with a tumult of shouts, tumbling down to the floor of the redoubt.

So stern was the rush of the 50th and 71st, that the French garrison was driven across the redoubt



and through its rear on to the armed bridge-head, into which the British swept with the flying French, slaying them as they fled. In a moment the floating bridge was crowded with pursuers and pursued. The English quickly turned the guns of Fort Napoleon on Fort Ragusa across the river; that place was now firing hurriedly at the bridge to arrest the rush of the pursuing English. The bridge was broken, the farther bank was safe; but so sudden was the surprise, so fierce the onfall, so wild the panic, that the garrison of Fort Ragusa actually abandoned that strong place, and fled, and some men of the 92nd, swimming over, restored the bridge. The British lost in the fight 179 in killed and wounded, but of the French 259, including the governor and sixteen officers, were captured. The forts, the bridge, with huge supplies of ammunition and stores, were destroyed; and Hill, marching fast, reached Merida in safety, having performed the most brilliant stroke of individual soldiership in the campaign.

Marmont was now isolated. Napoleon, too, was on the point of declaring war with Russia, and was absorbed in collecting and organising that stupendous host which was to invade Russia, and perish before 1812 ended in its snows. He had no attention to waste on Spain, and no reinforcements to send to his generals there. They ought not, indeed, to have needed any. There were still over 300,000

good soldiers under the French eagles in Spain, commanded by generals trained in Napoleon's school and familiar with victory; while Wellington could only put 32,000 British soldiers in line of battle, with 24,000 Portuguese of fair fighting quality. Marmont had 70,000 troops under his command, of which 52,000 were present with the eagles, and he was able to call up reinforcements amounting to 12,000 more. Wellington had 36,000 infantry, 3500 cavalry, and 54 guns under his personal command. With this force he proposed to strike at Marmont, whose columns were concentrating on the Douro.

Marmont was not a fortunate general; but he was of a quick and daring spirit, an adroit tactician, whose swift brain could manœuvre columns and battalions on a battlefield as a fine chess-player moves his pawns and knights on a board. He was a captain, in a word, not unworthy of contending with Wellington; and, in the tangle of marches and counter-marches round Salamanca, when two great armies were circling round each other like two angry hawks in mid-air, Marmont, with his lighter-footed French infantry, fairly outmarched and, for the moment, outgeneralled Wellington. It was in the thunderstroke of actual battle that the English general rebuked the genius and wrecked the art of his gallant rival.

Wellington crossed the Agueda on June 13, and began his march for the Tormes. His aim was to strike at Marmont, and crush him before rein-

forcements could reach him from the south or the north. Marmont's plan, in turn, was to evade Wellington's stroke, but cling to the Tormes, behind the screen of the forts at Salamanca, till the gathering French columns should give him a resistless superiority in numbers, and enable him to drive Wellington back in ruin to Portugal.

Wellington reached Salamanca on June 17, five days before Napoleon issued his declaration of war against Russia. Marmont fell back, trusting to the forts of Salamanca to detain Wellington at least fifteen days, by which time the reinforcements pushing on at speed from Madrid and the north would have joined him. The forts were strong and heavily armed. No less than thirteen convents and twenty-two colleges had been destroyed to supply materials for their construction. They were strongly garrisoned, and Wellington had no battering train. The men who had stormed Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos, however, were formidable assailants. The attack on the forts was momentarily checked by failure of ammunition, but operations were urged with such stern energy, that Marmont advanced in tempestuous fashion to the relief of his sorely pressed garrison. Wellington was content with barring Marmont's advance, until, on June 29, the forts surrendered, when Marmont fell back with angry reluctance to the Douro to wait for his reinforcements.



Patience is, in no sense, a French virtue ; and Marmont, sore from the loss of his forts and in a mood of battle, found it impossible to stand on the defensive till Bonnet from the Asturias and Joseph in person from Madrid, with reinforcements which would give him an overwhelming superiority, came up. He began a series of rapid movements, the aim of which was, while evading actual battle, to get past Wellington's flank, and strike at the Ciudad Rodrigo road on his rear, which formed the Englishman's line of retreat to Portugal.

The weather was fine, the country open, the rivers everywhere fordable. Marmont was familiar with every wrinkle in the face of the soil, and he began a series of fierce, swift, and exquisitely skilful manœuvres to get past his wary antagonist, yet never risking a battle except under conditions of overwhelming advantage, his hardy and active soldiers more than once marching fifty miles without a halt. Wellington had to meet these manœuvres as a cool fencer meets the keen and deadly thrusts of his antagonist. Horse, foot, and artillery were but the human pawns in this great game of chess, and the movements of the armies yielded some of the most picturesque spectacles in the whole of the war.

One such scene occurred on July 18. The two armies were racing for the Guarena. If Marmont reached it first, Wellington would be cut off from



Salamanca. The day was one of great heat; the men were marching in close order; the sky was full of the dust of their march. But war has not often yielded a stranger sight. "Hostile columns of infantry, only half musket-shot from each other," says Napier, "were marching impetuously towards a common goal, the officers on each side pointing forward with their swords, or touching their caps and waving their hands in courtesy, while the German cavalry, huge men, on huge horses, rode between in a close compact body, as if to prevent a collision; at times the loud tones of command to hasten the march were heard passing from the front to the rear on both sides, and now and then the rush of French bullets came sweeping over the columns, whose violent pace was continually accelerated."

Thus moving for ten miles, but keeping the most perfect order, both armies approached the Guarena, and the enemy seeing the Light Division, although more in their power than the others, was yet outstripping them in the march, increased the fire of their guns and menaced an attack with infantry. The German cavalry instantly drew close round, the column plunged suddenly into a hollow dip of ground on the left, and ten minutes after the head of the division was in the stream of the Guarena. Again on the 20th, the same strange scene was witnessed. The two armies were marching at speed on

close and parallel lines of hills, Marmont striving to reach the ford of Huerta on the Tormes. The eager columns were within musket-shot of each other; the cavalry was watching for an opportunity to charge; where the ground gave the chance, a battery of horse-artillery would wheel round and unlimber, and pour grape into the flank of the opposite column. But the infantry, dust-covered and footsore, never halted. With sloping muskets and swinging gait they pressed forward at speed; the officers, "like gallant gentlemen who bore no malice and knew no fear," sometimes waving their hands to each other from either column.

But time was flying; Marmont's reinforcements were fast coming up, and Wellington, who could neither escape nor grasp his agile opponent, was meditating a retreat. For the first and only time in his life he was beaten in tactics! A letter to Castanos declaring Wellington's intentions to fall back on Portugal fell into Marmont's hands. The long strife in tactics had given the French general an exultant but misleading sense of superiority over the Englishman. That he should escape by a retreat was a thought intolerable to Marmont's fiery temper; and he gave Wellington what he wanted—the chance of a fair fight.

## CHAPTER XXV

### SALAMANCA

NORTH of Salamanca the Tormes forms a great loop, and on the night of July 18 Marmont had seized the ford of Huerta at the crown of the loop. He could march down either bank of the river to Salamanca. Wellington was in front of Salamanca, in a position perpendicular to the river, his left opposite the ford of Santa Maria, his right—thrust far out into the plain—touched, but did not occupy, one of a pair of rocky and isolated hills called the Arapiles. He thus stood in readiness for battle on the left bank of the river betwixt Marmont and Salamanca. On the right bank of that stream, opposite the ford of Santa Maria, was the 3rd division, strongly entrenched.

From these positions the wearied armies confronted each other for nearly two days; but on July 23 Marmont's reinforcements would be up, and Wellington decided he must retreat. This was exactly what Marmont feared, and he watched with feverish alertness for every sign that the British were falling back. On the 22nd the Frenchman made a



daring move. He marched straight down from the crown of the river-loop, seized the outer of the two hills we have described, and made a dash at the inner one. If he could seize both he would hold an almost unassailable position within easy striking distance of his enemy. Wellington, however, quickly sent forward some troops to seize and hold the nearer Arapiles. The race was keen. The French reached the hill first, but were driven from it by the more stubborn British. These rugged hills, rising suddenly from the floor of the plain, were not quite 500 yards apart: and in an instant they were thus turned into armed and menacing outposts, from whose rough slopes two great armies, within striking distance of each other, kept stern watch.

Marmont could use the hill he held as a pivot round which he might swing his army, so as to cut the English off from the Ciudad Rodrigo road. Wellington, to guard against this, wheeled his lines round—using the English Arapiles as a hinge—through a wide segment of a circle, till his battle-line looked eastward, and what had been his rear became his front. The English Arapiles, and not the ford of Santa Maria, thus became the tip of his left wing; his right, thrust out to the village of Aldea Tejada, barred the road by which Marmont might slip past to Salamanca. For hours the two armies stood in this position. Wellington's baggage and waggons meanwhile were falling back along the





road to Ciudad Rodrigo, and their dust, rising in the clear summer air, caught Marmont's troubled eye. Wellington, he believed, was in retreat, and would escape!

At that thought Marmont's prudence vanished. He hurried his left wing—two divisions with fifty guns, under Maucune—at speed along the crest of some low hills that ran in a wide curve round Wellington's position. Maucune was to seize the Ciudad Rodrigo road, and so throw Wellington off his only line of retreat. But, in his eagerness to reach that prize, Marmont forgot that he was dislocating, so to speak, his own left wing. As Maucune moved away, a gap, growing ever wider, yawned in the French front. And it was almost as perilous to commit such a blunder in Wellington's presence as in that of Napoleon himself. Wellington watched with cool content till Marmont's blunder was past remedy. "At last I have him," broke from his lips; and, turning to the Spanish general, Alava, who stood by his side, he caught him by the arm, and said, "My dear Alava, Marmont is lost!" Then he sealed Marmont's fault, and made it irretrievable, with a counter-stroke of thunder. The 3rd division was shot across the head of Maucune's columns, the 5th was hurled upon its flank.

Pakenham was in command of "the Fighting Third," and Wellington's orders were given to him in person, and with unconventional bluntness. "Do you see

those fellows on the hill, Pakenham?" he said, pointing to where the French columns were now visible; "throw your division into columns of battalions at them directly, and drive them to the devil!" Pakenham, an alert and fiery soldier, formed his battalions into column with a word, and took them swiftly forward in an attack described by admiring onlookers as "the most spirited and most perfect thing of the kind ever seen." His columns, as they neared the French, deployed into line, the companies bringing forward their right shoulders at a run as they marched, and the astonished French, who expected to see an army in retreat, suddenly found these red, threatening lines, edged with deadly steel, moving fiercely on them. The French broke into a hurried fire, their columns tried to deploy, their officers sacrificing themselves to win them space and time. But the advance of the 3rd was as unpausing and relentless as fate. As they neared the French the more eager spirits began to run forward: the lines seemed to curve outward, and Pakenham, in his own words, "let the men loose." The bayonets fell to the level, the English ran in with a shout, and the French formation was shattered almost in an instant.

Wallace's brigade, to quote the description of an eye-witness, halted a moment as they reached the brow of the hill to dress their lines, disordered by the speed of their advance and the heavy fire of



the French guns. Just as they paused, Foy's column threw in a deep and rolling volley, and in a moment the earth was strewn with fallen soldiers from Wallace's front. Stepping coolly over their slain or wounded comrades, however, the brigade moved steadily forward; and Wallace, leading them, turned, looked back on his own men, and with an inspiring gesture pointed to the enemy. That gesture was the signal to charge! The French themselves believed that, having caught their enemies with a fire so dreadful, they had destroyed them, and were now moving forward in triumph, when they saw through the smoke the faces of their opponents coming on with bayonets at the charge. In an instant there came from the British a prolonged and shattering volley, followed without a moment's pause by the fierce push of the bayonet. The solid French column swayed backwards, crumbled into fragments, and fled!

In this fight the 44th captured the eagle of the French 62nd, while two standards were taken by the 4th and 30th. The regimental record of the 44th says that the French officer who carried the eagle wrenched it from the pole, and was endeavouring to conceal it under his grey overcoat, when Lieutenant Pearce attacked him. A French infantry soldier came up with levelled bayonet, but was shot dead by a private of the 44th. The eagle was captured, fastened to a sergeant's halberd, the



44th giving three cheers, and was carried in triumph through the whole fight, gleaming above English bayonets instead of French.

Close following on Pakenham's charge came a splendid exploit on the part of the British cavalry. The French light horse rode at the right flank of Pakenham's division. At a single word of command the 5th fell back at an angle to the line, and one far-heard volley drove the French horse off with broken squadrons. The 5th division was by this time pressing heavily on Maucune's flank. Suddenly the interval betwixt the two British divisions was filled with the tumult of galloping hoofs. The Heavy Brigade—the 3rd and 4th Dragoons and the 5th Dragoon Guards—under Le Marchant, and Anson's light cavalry, were riding at speed on the unhappy French. Three massive bodies of ranked infantry in succession were struck and destroyed in that furious charge, and the leading squadron, under Lord Edward Somerset, galloping in advance, caught a battery of five guns, slew its gunners, and brought back the guns in triumph. Many of the broken French infantry fled to the English lines for protection from the long swords of the terrible horsemen.

That fiery, exultant rush of British horsemen completed the destruction of Maucune's division, and captured no less than 2000 prisoners.

In the last charge the three regiments had become mixed together; the officers rode where they could

find places, but a rough formation was kept; and still riding at speed, the English horsemen drove at the French. At ten yards' distance the French threw in a close and murderous volley which brought down nearly every fourth horse or man. But the rush of galloping horsemen was not checked, and in a moment cavalry and infantry were joined in one mad *mélée*. At last the French broke and fled. Le Marchant himself rode and fought like a private soldier in the charge. When the French broke he drew rein and commenced to call back his dragoons. He saw a considerable mass of French infantry draw together, and a handful of the 4th Dragoons prepare to charge them. He joined the little band of cavalry, and with brandished sword rode at their head and fell, shot through the body, under the very bayonets of the French.

It was five o'clock when the battle began; before six o'clock the French left was destroyed. This is the fact which made a French officer describe Salamanca as "the battle in which 40,000 men were beaten in forty minutes." But the battle was not quite over yet. Marmont, riding in fierce despair to where the fight was raging, eager to remedy his blunder, had fallen desperately wounded, and been carried off the field. Bonnet, his successor, too was wounded; the command fell into the hands of Clausel, a cool and resourceful soldier. At one point only the British attack had failed. Pack's Portuguese brigade had

been launched at the French Arapiles. But the advantage of ground was with the French. By some blunder the Portuguese were led against a shoulder of the hill almost as steep as a house-roof. "The attack," says Sir Scott Lillie, "was made at the point where I could not ascend on horseback in the morning." The French met the Portuguese, too, with a sort of furious contempt, and drove them back in wreck, and, for a moment, the British line at this point was shaken. Wellington in person brought up Clinton's division, and the French, grown suddenly exultant and coming on eagerly, were driven back.

Night was now falling on the battlefield, but the long grass, parched with the summer heat, had caught fire, and night itself was made luminous with the racing flames as they ran up the hill-slopes and over the level, where the wounded lay thick. Clausel, with stubborn courage and fine skill, was covering the tumult of the French retreat, while Clinton was pressing on him with fiery energy. Here is Napier's picture of the last scene in this great fight :—"In the darkness of the night the fire showed from afar how the battle went. On the English side a sheet of flame was seen, sometimes advancing with an even front, sometimes pricking forth in spear-heads, now falling back in waving lines, anon darting upwards in one vast pyramid, the apex of which often approached yet never gained



the actual summit of the mountain; but the French musketry rapid as lightning sparkled along the brow of the height with unvarying fulness, and with what destructive effects the dark gaps and changing shapes of the adverse fire showed too plainly; meanwhile Pakenham turned the left, Foy glided into the forest, the effulgent crest of the ridge became black and silent, and the whole French army vanished as it were in the darkness."

The French were saved from utter destruction by a characteristic Spanish blunder. They could pass the Tormes at only one of two points—Alba de Tormes, where Wellington had placed a strong Spanish force, and Huerta. Wellington, riding with the foremost files, reached Huerta, and found it silent and empty. The French had gone by Alba de Tormes, which the Spanish general in charge had carelessly abandoned! "The French would all have been taken," wrote Wellington afterwards, "if Don Carlos had left the garrison in Alba de Tormes as I directed, or if, having taken it away, he had informed me it was not there." As it was, the French found the ford open, and pushed their retreat with such speed, that, on the day after the fight, Clausel was forty miles from Salamanca.

Wellington overtook the French rear-guard on the 23rd, and there followed a memorable cavalry exploit, one of those rare instances in which steady squares have been crushed by a cavalry charge.



The heavy German horse, riding fast with narrow front up a valley, found the French in solid squares of infantry on the slope above them. The left squadron wheeled without breaking their stride, and rode gallantly at the nearest square. The French stood firm and shot fast, but the Germans charged to the very bayonet points. A wounded horse stumbled forward on the face of the square, and broke it, and in a moment the horsemen were through the gap, and the square was destroyed. A second square and a third were in like manner shattered. These fine horsemen, that is, in one splendid charge destroyed three infantry squares and captured 1400 prisoners! Wellington described this charge as "the most gallant he ever witnessed."

Salamanca was a notable fight and an overwhelming victory. Wellington himself would have selected Salamanca as the battle which best proved his military genius. If not so history-making as Waterloo, or so wonderful, considered as a mere stroke of war, as Assaye, it was the most soldierly and skilful of all Wellington's battles. He certainly showed in that fight all the qualities of a consummate captain—keen vision, swift resolve, perfect mastery of tactics, the faculty for smiting at the supreme moment with overwhelming strength—all in the highest degree. In numbers the French were slightly superior; in artillery their superiority was great. Marmont's army was made up of war-hardened veterans, in that mood

in which the French soldiers are most dangerous, the exultant expectation of victory. Yet in little more than an hour that great, disciplined, exultant host, with leaders slain and order wrecked, was rolling in all the tumult and confusion of defeat along the road which led to Alba de Tormes. With some justice Wellington himself said, "I never saw an army receive such a beating." It reached the ford a mob rather than an army. All regimental formation had vanished. The men had lost their officers, officers had forgotten their men, soldiers had flung away their arms. The single purpose of the disordered multitude was flight. Salamanca certainly proves that Wellington knew how to strike with terrific force!

The British lost in killed and wounded 5200; the French loss was 14,000, of whom 7000 were prisoners. Three French generals were killed, four were wounded, two eagles, six standards, and eleven guns were captured. Three weeks after Salamanca Clausel could gather at Valladolid less than one half of the gallant host smitten with disaster so sudden and overwhelming on the evening of July 22.

The news of this great defeat reached Napoleon in the depths of Russia on September 2, and the tidings filled him with wrath. He declared that the unhappy Marmont had "sacrificed his country to personal vanity," and was guilty of "a crime." Failure, indeed, was, in Napoleon's ethics, the last

and worst of crimes, the sin that had never forgiveness. Napoleon's rage against Marmont, curiously enough, was only soothed by the perusal of Wellington's despatches describing the battle. Napoleon himself had turned the manufacture of bulletins into mere experiments in lying, and he knew that all his generals followed his example. He never, therefore, believed the accounts given by his generals of their operations. But when he read Wellington's despatch he said, "This is true! I am sure this is a true account; and Marmont, after all, is not so much to blame!"

The effect of the victory in Spain was far-reaching and instant. Joseph fell back in haste towards Madrid. Soult had to abandon the siege of Cadiz, surrender the fertile plains of Andalusia, and sullenly gather his columns together for retreat northwards. Wellington himself marched on Madrid. The moral effect of driving Joseph from his capital must be immense, and decided the English general's tactics. On the night of August 11 Joseph abandoned the city, on the 12th Wellington entered it, amid a tumult of popular rejoicing. On the 13th the Retiro, with its garrison, over 2000 strong, surrendered. It was the chief arsenal yet remaining to the French in Spain, and contained 180 guns and vast military stores. It shows Joseph's feeble generalship that he left such a prize to the English.

Wellington now seemed at the height alike of



fame and of success. In a single brief campaign he had captured two great fortresses, overthrown a powerful army, an army commanded by a famous French marshal; he had driven Joseph in flight to Toledo, and had occupied Madrid in triumph. But in reality Wellington's position was most perilous, and the peril grew every hour more menacing. Soult was marching from Andalusia; from every province the French columns were gathering towards Valencia. If the armies of Soult, Joseph, and Suchet united, they would form a host thrice as great in scale as that under Wellington's command. An expedition from Sicily, indeed, under Lord Bentinck, was to have landed at Alicante, on the eastern coast of Spain, so as to hold Suchet engaged, and make a combination so dangerous impossible. But Bentinck chose to attempt a meaningless adventure in Italy instead, and the English Cabinet lacked energy sufficient to compel him to carry out the plan arranged. Bentinck took 15,000 good soldiers into Italy, where he accomplished nothing. Thrown into the east of Spain, he might have changed the course of history. "Lord William's decision," wrote Wellington, "is fatal to the campaign, at least at present. If he should land anywhere in Italy, he will, as usual, be obliged to re-embark, and we shall have lost a golden opportunity here."

Wellington, however, calculated on outstripping



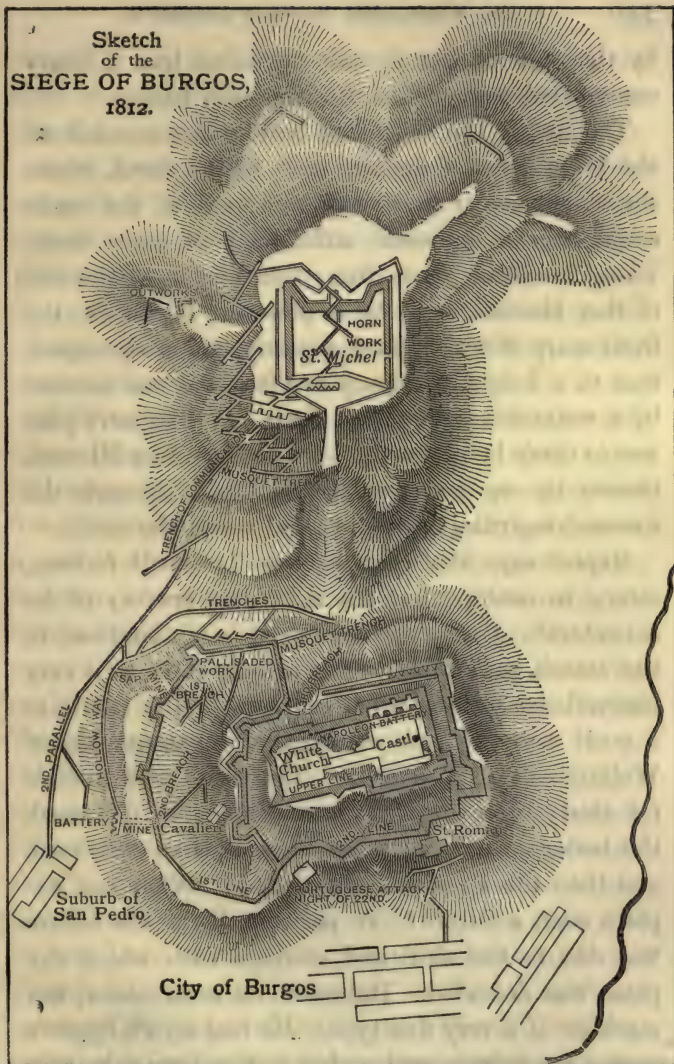
the French armies in speed, and beating them if met in equal numbers, or evading a battle if their numbers were overwhelming, until, by discord amongst the commanders and hunger in the ranks, the French hosts were driven once more asunder.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CLIMAX AND ANTI-CLIMAX

MEANWHILE Burgos was the next great place of strength the French held in the north, and Wellington resolved to assail it. It commanded the French line of communications with the Pyrenees. Its capture would enable Wellington to cut himself loose from Lisbon as a base, and to find a new sea base on the northern coast. On September 1 Wellington left Madrid, Clausel falling back before him; on the 19th he reached Burgos. The castle of Burgos stood on the summit of an oblong conical hill, close to the base of which flows the Arlanzon. There were three concentric lines of defences. The first, running round the base of the hill, consisted of an old escarp wall, modernised and strengthened. Next, higher up the slope, came a complete field retrenchment, palisaded and formidably armed. Higher still came another girdle of earthworks. There are two crests to the hill; on one stood an ancient building called the White Church, which had been transfigured into a modern fortress; on the second and higher crest stood the ancient keep of the castle, turned

Sketch  
of the  
SIEGE OF BURGOS,  
1812.



from Napier's "Peninsular War."

by the skill of the French engineers into a heavy casemented work called the Napoleon battery.

The fire of the Napoleon battery commanded all the lower lines of defence save to the north, where the slope was so sharp that the guns of the castle could not be depressed sufficiently to cover them. Three hundred yards from this face rose the hill of San Michael, held by a powerful hornwork, the front scarp of which, hard, slippery, and steep-angled, rose to a height of twenty-five feet, and was covered by a counter-scarp ten feet deep. Wellington's plan was to carry by storm the hornwork on San Michael, thence by sap and escalade to break through the successive girdles of defence, and storm the castle.

Napier says that Burgos was "a small fortress, strong in nothing but the skill and bravery of its defenders." Jones, who took part as an engineer in the attack, says that it "would only rank as a very insignificant fortress when opposed to the efforts of a good army." And yet Burgos represents one of Wellington's rare failures. The siege was pushed for thirty-three days, five assaults were delivered, the besiegers suffered a loss of more than 2000 men, and then the siege was abandoned! What can explain such a failure? In part, no doubt, the failure was due to the skill and courage with which the place was defended. Dubreton, its commander, was a soldier of a very fine type. He had all Philippon's genius for defence, and added to it a fiery valour in



attack to which Philippon had no claims. In the siege of Burgos the sallies were almost as numerous—and quite as fierce—as the assaults.

Lord Londonderry, however, gives the key to the story when he says that the castle of Burgos "was a place of commanding altitude, and, considering the process adopted for its reduction, one of prodigious strength." It was the disproportion betwixt the means of attack and the resource for defence which explains the failure of the siege.

Wellington, in a word, was attempting to pull down Burgos, so to speak, with the naked hand. His siege train consisted of three 18-pounders and five howitzers. There was not even, as Jones puts it, a half-instructed miner or a half-instructed sapper to carry out operations. For the few guns employed by the besiegers there were not enough balls, and a sum of money was paid for every French shot that could be picked up and brought to the batteries. Probably every second ball fired at Burgos was in this way a French derelict discharged at its original owners. On the evening of October 6, Jones records "there remained only forty-two rounds of 24-pounder shot." The siege must have stopped from sheer lack of ammunition, but that the batteries were able to fire back at the French the bullets which the French had already discharged at them. As Jones sums up the story of the siege: "The artillery was never able to make head against the fire of the

place; the engineers, for want of the necessary assistance, were unable to advance the trenches; and the garrison were hourly destroying the troops without being molested themselves." And yet this siege without guns and without engineers, a mere effort of almost unarmed valour, would have succeeded but for the advance of the French armies for its relief. A great prize was thus missed. In Burgos lay the artillery and stores of the whole army of Portugal. Its capture would have left the French without the power to undertake a siege anywhere.

The plan of the siege was to carry by sap, or mines, or escalade, rather than by gun-fire, each of the lines in succession, turning the guns of the captured line against the one next to be attacked. Even with such inadequate appliances Burgos ought to have offered no unconquerable difficulty to the troops that had stormed Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos. But, for one thing, Wellington did not employ in the siege the soldiers who had performed those feats. The attacking force at Burgos consisted of Portuguese troops and of the 1st and 6th divisions, composed chiefly of young or sickly troops. Wellington himself said afterwards that his fault at Burgos was that "I took there the most inexperienced instead of the best troops." It may be added that time was a decisive element in the siege. Souham, with 30,000 troops, hovered near, only waiting for reinforcements

to come up to fall on Wellington; while Soult, moving from Andalusia, threatened his communications with Portugal.

Wellington's first step was to assault the great hornwork on San Michael. It was a skilfully constructed work, with a sloping scarp 45 feet high, heavily armed and covered by the fire of the castle. The assault was delivered on the night of September 19; the resistance was desperate. At one point the assault failed, and the British lost more than 400 men. But the 79th, led by Major Somers Cocks, broke in, and the place was carried, the garrison fighting its way through and escaping. On the night of September 22 an attempt was made to escalade the exterior line of works, and it failed. The wall was 23 feet high; the Portuguese who shared in the attack hung back. The British escalading party, made up of detachments from the 79th and the Guards, raced up their ladders bravely, but were in numbers quite inadequate to their task. They were driven back with great loss, and their leader, Major Lawrie of the 79th, was left dead in the ramparts. Lawrie shone in pluck, but failed in conduct. As Wellington put it, "He paid no attention to his orders, notwithstanding the pains I took in writing and reading and explaining them to him twice over. Instead of regulating the attack as he ought, he rushed on as if he had been the leader of a forlorn hope. He had my instructions



in his pocket ; and, as the French got possession of his body and were made acquainted with the plan, the attack could never be repeated."

A mine was next driven under the ramparts and exploded on the 29th, and an imperfect breach formed. A party of the 1st division tried to storm it, and failed. Part of the storming party missed the breach in the dark, found the wall uninjured, and returned, reporting no breach existed. A sergeant and four men, however, found the true breach, mounted its crest, the defenders falling back in panic. The men of Badajos, they believed, were upon them. Discovering at last that the attacking party consisted of only five soldiers, the French rallied, drove their assailants down the breach, and the brave sergeant and his comrades returned with streaming wounds, to tell of their failure. On October 4 another mine was exploded, a new breach effected, and a party of the 24th, under Lieutenant Holmes, instantly charged through the smoke, scrambled over the ruins of the breach, and gained the parapet. The old breach at the same moment was assaulted by another detachment under Frazer, and so swift was Frazer's leading, and so gallantly was he supported, that this breach too—though strongly guarded—was carried. On the next evening, however, a strong party of French leaped from the upper line of defence, charged down with great speed and resolution, caught the English unawares, drove them out, and destroyed the lodg-



ment they had made. Only with great slaughter was the position re-won. On the night of the 7th, again, the French made a daring sortie, in repelling which there fell one of the finest soldiers in the army, Major Somers Cocks. On the 11th another mine was sprung, a breach formed, and the outer line carried. On the 18th a desperate attempt was made to carry the second line by escalade. The attack was gallant, and for a moment success seemed won. Then, in overpowering numbers, the French rallied, and drove back their assailants.

The siege of Burgos, as we have said, was really an attempt to pull down stone walls, gallantly held and formidably armed, with the naked hand. Yet, in spite of the many failures of the siege, Wellington would undoubtedly have captured Burgos but that the army of the north had by this time reinforced Souham. Soult had effected a junction with the army of the centre under Jourdan, and Wellington ran the imminent risk of being assailed by forces nearly treble his own. On October 21 the siege was raised. In the darkness of night the British army filed under the walls of the castle, and crossed the bridge of the Arlanzon, which lay directly beneath the guns of Burgos. The wheels of the English artillery were bound with straw, orders were given only in whispers, and, noiselessly almost as an army of ghosts, the troops crossed the bridge. Some Spanish horse, however, found that silent march so

close to the frowning guns of Burgos too trying for their nerves. They broke into a gallop; the sound of their hoofs woke the castle. The guns opened fire but in the darkness soon lost their range, and did little harm.

Then began that tragical retreat from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo, a chapter of war written in characters almost as black as those which tell the story of the retreat to Corunna. The retreat lasted from the night of October 21, when Wellington's troops defiled in silence across the bridge under the guns of Burgos, to November 20, when, ragged, footsore, with discipline shaken and fame diminished, and having lost 9000 men killed, wounded, or "missing," it went into cantonments around Ciudad Rodrigo. In its earlier stages the retreat had, so to speak, two branches. Wellington was falling back in a southerly line from Burgos to Salamanca; Hill was retreating before Soult westwards from Madrid to the same point. After a junction was effected the combined army fell back from Salamanca to Ciudad Rodrigo. The course of the famous retreat may be thus compared roughly to the letter Y, with Burgos and Madrid representing the tips of the extended arms, Salamanca as the point of junction, and Ciudad Rodrigo the base. The whole route of Wellington's troops, by the road they traversed from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo, is less than 300 miles; the time occupied in traversing it was nearly five weeks.

The marches were short, the halts long. And yet the British army came perilously near the point of mere dissolution in the process.

The secret of the sufferings and losses of the march may be told in half-a-dozen sentences. The weather was bitter; the rain fell incessantly; the rivers ran bank-high. The route lay through marshy plains with a clayey subsoil. The troops toiled on "ankle-deep in clay, mid-leg in water," oftentimes barefooted, till strength failed. The British commissariat broke hopelessly down. For days the troops fed on acorns and chestnuts, or on such wild swine as they could shoot. Many of Wellington's troops had marched from Cadiz; many were survivors from the Walcheren expedition, with the poison of its bitter fever yet in their blood. So sickness raged amongst them. Wellington's staff worked badly. There was no accurate timing of the marches. A regiment would stand in mud and rain, knapsack on back, for hours, waiting for some combination that failed.

The retreat, too, was marked by a curious succession of tactical mischances to the English. Souham was pushing Wellington back always by a flanking movement round his left; and river after river was lost by the accident of a mine failing or of a bridge being neglected. Twice in this campaign, it must be remembered — after the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajos, that is—the British troops had got completely out of hand, and had plunged



into furious license. This had shaken the authority of the officers and loosened the discipline of the men. And in this way the excesses of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajos helped to produce the disorder and horrors of the retreat from Burgos. The British soldier in retreat is usually in a mood of sullen disgust, which makes him a difficult, if not a dangerous, subject to handle. At Torquemara were huge wine-vaults, and the British rear-guard fell on these with a thirst and recklessness which turned whole regiments for the moment into packs of reeling and helpless drunkards. It is said that 12,000 British soldiers were at the same moment in a state of sottish drunkenness. This might have led to some startling disaster but for the circumstance that the pursuing French army got slightly more drunk than even the English. Under such conditions it is not to be wondered at that the disastrous siege of Burgos, and the yet more disastrous retreat from it, cost Wellington 9000 men.

Wellington's difficulties, it is to be noted, were created by his very success. When he seized the capital and marched on Burgos, he was thrusting at the very heart of the French power, and this produced a hurried concentration of the French armies from every part of Spain. This was the political and strategic result for which Wellington made his stroke. He brought up Soult from Andalusia, Caffrelli from the north, Suchet from



Catalonia, and so delivered these provinces. But the military result was a concentration before which, since his stroke at Burgos had failed, he had to fall back.

In the retreat curious terms were established betwixt the pursuing French cavalry and the files of the British rear-guard. The effervescence of battle betwixt them had vanished, there remained only its flat and exhausted residuum. They exchanged jests as well as sword-strokes and bayonet-thrusts. The French horsemen would ride beside the heavily-tramping British infantry—"sometimes almost mixing in our ranks," as an officer who was present writes, or near enough to bandy wit in bad Spanish. Every now and again the French horse would make a sudden charge; there would be a chorus of shouts, a crackle of angry musketry. A score of stragglers would be carried off, a dozen slain or wounded would be stretched on the muddy road, but the retreat never paused.

Costello, in his "Adventures of a Soldier," gives many details of the sufferings of the rank and file as they trudged along the muddy roads, most of them barefoot, or halted at night under the pelting showers without fire or food. The officers suffered equally with the men. Costello draws a touching picture of one gallant youth, Lord Charles Spencer, only eighteen years of age, during one of the halts. The gallant lad was faint with hunger, trembling

with cold and weakness. "He stood perched upon some branches that had been cut down for fuel, the tears silently running down his cheeks for very weakness. He was waiting while a few acorns were roasted, his only meal. More than one rough soldier brought from his knapsack some broken fragment of biscuit and offered it to the exhausted youth. In such scenes as those supplied by the retreat," says Costello, "lords find that they are men, and men that they are comrades."

The retreat was marked by some brilliant strokes of soldiership on both sides. At Venta del Pozo Halkett's Germans and the 11th and 16th Dragoons, in a gallant sword-fight, drove back a mass of French horsemen much stronger than themselves in number. The Douro was turned by the French with a feat of daring rare even in this war. A regiment of the German brigade had destroyed the bridge at Tordesillas, and held in strength a tower at some little distance from the site of the ruined bridge. In the bitter winter night sixty French officers and sergeants, headed by an officer famous for his exploits, named Guingret, made a small raft, on which they placed their clothes, and, each man carrying his sword in his teeth, swam across the turbid and ice-cold river, pushing their raft before them. On reaching the farther bank they raced, naked as they were, at the tower and carried it. The spectacle of sixty naked Frenchmen, sword in hand, suddenly emerging

from the river and the darkness, and charging furiously at them, was too much for the astonished Germans! The tower was abandoned, and the passage of the French across the river secured.

At Salamanca the junction of Hill raised Wellington's forces to 50,000 British and Portuguese troops, with 12,000 raw Spaniards. But Souham's columns had joined those of Soult, the latter being in command of the whole. The French had thus a host of 90,000 veteran soldiers, 12,000 being cavalry, and 120 guns. Wellington held both the Arapiles, and offered battle. The ground was classic, and Wellington hoped he might repeat on Soult the stroke which had destroyed Marmont. Soult, as a matter of fact, repeated Marmont's fatal turning movement past Wellington's right, striking at the British communications. But he was less rash than Marmont, and Wellington's terrible smiting power was better understood. So Soult moved slowly round the English right in a wide curve beyond the reach of attack. But the curve was too wide! "Marmont," says Napier, "closing with a short, quick turn, a falcon striking at an eagle, received a buffet that broke his pinions and spoilt his flight. Soult, a wary kite, sailing slowly and with a wide wheel to seize a helpless prey, lost it altogether." Wellington, watching Soult's movement, threw his army rapidly into three columns, crossed the Junguen, and, in order of battle, with his artillery and cavalry disposed as a



screen, marched his whole force round the French left, and reached the Valmusa, beyond the curve of Soult's sweep. That astonished commander at nightfall found the adroit Englishman outside his columns! Wellington held the main road, while the French were floundering along the country tracks. A low-lying fog and blinding rain-showers made the landscape obscure; but Wellington had achieved the feat of carrying his army across the front of the largest French force ever gathered in one mass in the Peninsula, an army having two guns for every one the English possessed, and with 12,000 of the finest cavalry in the world!

The French suffered almost as much in pursuit as the English in retreat, and the mere failure of means of subsistence made it impossible for them to hold their forces together for many days. Soult's great army broke up, and the memorable campaign of 1812 ended. Wellington issued a circular-letter to the commanding officers of battalions rebuking in bitter sentences the disorders which arose in the retreat from Burgos. "The officers," he declared, "had lost all command of their men," and this was due to their "habitual inattention to their duty." "Discipline," he wrote, "had suffered in a greater degree than he had ever witnessed, or even read of, in any army; and this without the excuse of special hardships." "No army," he said, "had ever made shorter marches in retreat, had longer rests, or been



so little pressed by a pursuing enemy." In that famous memorandum Wellington lost his usual cool judgment and clear vision of facts. The army had suffered more than he knew; perhaps more than he cared to know. "At one time," says the regimental record of the 44th, "the men were without biscuit for eleven days, and received only one small ration of beef." As showing the losses in the retreat, a sergeant of the 7th company came up to his captain and reported, "Sir, the mule and camp-kettles are lost; but as I am the only man of the company left, it is not of much consequence." Wellington's censures, too, lacked discrimination. Some regiments—notably the Light Division and the Guards—had borne themselves like good soldiers in the retreat. But Wellington's chief defect in dealing with his soldiers lay in lack of sympathy, and a too ready indulgence in cold and sword-edged censure.

That a campaign which began with the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajos, and included the triumph of Salamanca and the entrance into Madrid, should have ended in the retreat from Burgos seems such an anti-climax as can be scarcely paralleled in history. It was a profound disappointment to English public opinion, and brought on Wellington himself a tempest of angry criticism. For a time the real scale of the marvellous success Wellington had achieved was obscured. Yet, as Wellington

himself, who always talked in sober prose, claimed, it was the most successful campaign in which a British army had for a century been engaged. Wellington had never more than 60,000 effective soldiers under his command; the French had more than four times that force. But Wellington had captured the two great frontier fortresses, overthrown Marmont, entered Madrid in triumph, delivered the whole south of Spain, captured the French arsenals in Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajos, Salamanca, Madrid, Astorga; taking—if Seville and the lines before Cadiz be included—no less than 3000 guns, and he had sent 20,000 French soldiers as prisoners to England.

And all this, it is to be noted, had been done practically without any help from the Spanish armies. That Hill, indeed, had to fall back from Madrid was owing to the deliberate disloyalty of the Spanish general Ballesteros, a betrayal which even the Spanish Junta found it necessary to punish by dismissal and imprisonment. Had Wellington, indeed, captured Burgos, there lay before him a very glittering possibility. Marching westward, and gathering up the forces of Ballesteros and the troops from Alicante, he would have confronted Soult with 100,000 men, and have inflicted upon him a defeat more shattering than that Marmont suffered at Salamanca—a defeat that might well have driven the French from Spain. This would have been the natural and shining climax of the campaign of

1812. The disloyalty of Spanish generals, the blunders of the Spanish Junta, and the utter failure of co-operation and help from Spain generally, spoiled this great scheme and gave to history the anti-climax of Burgos.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A GREAT MOUNTAIN MARCH

VITTORIA is the true and decisive climax of the Peninsular campaigns. Behind it are five years of changing struggle, a curiously chequered story of advance and retreat, of triumph and of disaster; shining threads of victory interwoven with black threads of calamity and hardship. If those years had seen the glories of Talavera and of Salamanca, of Busaco and of Badajos, they had also seen the black days of the retreat to Torres Vedras, and the later retreat after the failure at Burgos. But no reflux of fortune dims the glory of Vittoria. "In this campaign of six weeks," says Napier, "Wellington marched with 100,000 men 600 miles, passed six great rivers, gained one decisive battle, invested two fortresses, and drove 120,000 veteran troops from Spain." But Vittoria did even more. It shook the crown from the brow of Joseph. It finally overthrew Napoleon's whole plans about Spain; the plans on which he had practically staked his throne, and for which he expended, first and last, not less than half a million men. It gave a new complexion to the



struggle which, on the Continent, Russia and Austria and Prussia were now waging against Napoleon. It cast the blackness of swift-coming invasion on the soil of France itself.

Negotiations on the Continent were at that moment trembling betwixt peace and war. Napoleon had just secured the extension of an armistice to August 16, and it seemed probable that the armistice would result in a peace—a peace which would have enabled Napoleon to pour a new flood of veterans into the Peninsula. The news of Vittoria reached the camps of the opposing Powers on June 29. “The impression on the Allies,” says Sir Charles Stewart, “was strong and universal, and produced, in my opinion, a resumption of hostilities.”

Wellington himself has described the scene at Dresden when the story of Vittoria reached that city. Stadion, the Austrian Minister, received the letter bringing the news at midnight. As soon as he had read the letter he went immediately along the corridors of the château, knocking at the doors of kings and Ministers, and “calling them all (with some very *bruyante* expressions of joy) to get up, for he had good news from Spain. They soon assembled, and seeing that it was a blow that in all probability would deliver Spain, the Austrians took their line, and hostilities recommenced.” Napoleon’s agents themselves deplored “the fatal influence” Vittoria exerted on the negotiations with Austria

and Russia. Peace at that moment would have given to Napoleon a new lease of Imperial power; Vittoria robbed him of that chance.

For once, as the Vittoria campaign began, nearly every condition of the war was on Wellington's side. In Great Britain itself party divisions for the moment, at least, were hushed, and the only accusation the Opposition had to bring against the Ministry was that Wellington had not been adequately supported in Spain. It is evidence, too, both of the stubborn and enduring strength of Great Britain, and of the degree in which her command of the sea nourished her resources, that after nearly twenty years of wasting strife she was able to maintain the war on a scale exceeding anything previously attempted. In 1813 the population of Great Britain was only 18,000,000, whilst that of the French Empire was 42,000,000. But England—leaving out of count her fleet—maintained an armed force in Europe of 800,000 men. She spent in that year £107,000,000 sterling, £11,000,000 of this sum going as subsidies to her Continental allies, and £39,000,000 being raised as a loan at  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. England is essentially a domestic, peace-loving nation, impatient of debt, chary of taxation, preoccupied with commerce and manufactures. But the Peninsular war proves that, when need arises, England can wage battle on a scale, and sustain it with an energy, never exceeded, and not often paralleled, in history.

Wellington spent the winter and early spring which followed the retreat from Burgos in far-reaching preparations for the great campaign which was to destroy French power in the Peninsula. He sternly restored the discipline of his own troops, drew large reinforcements from England, reorganised his commissariat, lightened the burdens and made more effective the equipment of his soldiers, and so prepared an army which, in fighting efficiency, has never been surpassed in the history of war. It is a significant detail of the preparations for the campaign that every British infantryman carried in his knapsack three pairs of shoes, with an extra pair of spare soles and heels! Wellington, in a word, intended to win rather by the legs of his soldiers than by their bayonets. Wellington's Portuguese troops, too, hardened by Beresford's iron discipline, and equipped by Wellington's sleepless care, reached a high degree of efficiency. Wellington, moreover, was now in supreme command of the Spanish troops. A more desperate command never taxed the patience of a general. Wellington himself described, in his own blunt speech, the state of the Spanish armies. "There is not a single battalion or squadron in the Spanish armies," he wrote, "in a condition to take the field; there is not in the whole kingdom of Spain a dépôt of provisions for the support of a single battalion in operation for one day; not a shilling of money in any military chest. To move them forward at any



point now, against even inconsiderable bodies of the enemy, would be to ensure their certain destruction." But the magic of Wellington's genius quickly created a new order in even the distracted chaos of Spanish military affairs. Native valour and fine qualities of patient endurance were never lacking to the Spanish private; and Wellington, by degrees, gave the Spanish troops discipline, steadiness, and a reasonably effective equipment. So the spring of 1813 found Wellington with an army 70,000 strong, 40,000 of them being British, in a splendid state of efficiency and in the highest mood of courage.

There were still 230,000 French troops in Spain, but they were scattered diagonally across the Peninsula, from the Asturias on the north-west to Valencia on the east coast. The shadow of Napoleon's disasters in Russia, it may be added, lay with the chill and blackness of an eclipse on the French armies, and 20,000 veteran troops had already marched back through the Pyrenees to strengthen Napoleon in the fighting on the Elbe and the Rhine. The ablest French captain, Soult, had been driven from Spain by the suspicions and hate of Joseph, and was now commanding the Imperial Guard in Germany. The French army in Spain, hardy, brave, well-officered, familiar with war, and splendidly equipped, was thus left a body without a brain, an army without a general, and opposed to it was one of the greatest soldiers history has known!



Napoleon, amid the crowding disasters of his own struggle on the Continent, yet found time to plan the strategy of his armies in Spain. He warned Joseph that he must, for the moment, forget that he was a Spanish king, and remember only that he was a French general. "Hold Madrid and Valladolid," he wrote, "only as points of observation. Fix your headquarters, not as monarch, but as general of the French forces, at Valladolid." It is a curious proof of the genius for war possessed in equal measure by Napoleon and by Wellington to note how clearly Napoleon foresaw the movements which would be most dangerous to the French in Spain, and how exactly Wellington—as though he could read the inside of Napoleon's brain—adopted those very movements! "It would be fatal," Napoleon said, "if Suchet on the east coast and Clausel on the north were entangled in local struggles." The fate of the French depended on Joseph being able to concentrate the armies of the south, of the centre, and of Portugal at any one point.

But it was exactly these fatal conditions which the genius of Wellington imposed on the French. He fastened Suchet to the eastern coast by despatching Murray with an expedition against Tarragona. Murray was a poor general, and emerged from the campaign entangled in the uncomfortable process of a court-martial; but the mere presence of the British on the eastern coast cancelled Suchet, with over

65,000 good troops, as a factor in Joseph's campaign. In Biscay, again, Clausel, who had 40,000 troops under his command, was paralysed by the scale and energy of the guerilla warfare which Wellington kindled about him.

There remained only the army of the centre under Joseph. It stretched in a curve from Toledo to Zamora, through Madrid, guarding the central valley of the Douro, and covering the great road from Madrid through Burgos and Vittoria to France. The Douro itself, with its rugged banks and deep stream, made a direct attack on the French position almost impossible. The French right was covered by the wild and trackless hills stretching from the Tras-os-Montes to the sources of the Esla. On their left lay a war-wasted district, where a great army could find no subsistence, and would be exposed to flank attack as it marched. And yet, under these difficult conditions, Wellington's soldierly brain had already framed an audacious strategy destined to drive the French armies—marshals and generals and soldiers—in all the disorder of flight through the Pyrenees.

Wellington shrouded his designs in profoundest secrecy. By a pretence of aggressive movements he fixed Joseph's attention on his left, where Hill was stirring, and on his front, where he himself had gathered a formidable force. Meanwhile Graham, with 40,000 men, crossed the Douro within Portu-

guese territory, and was pushing at speed in a wide circle through the Tras-os-Montes, thus turning the French right and striking at Joseph's communications. This strategy violated one of the canons of war. Wellington was dividing his forces in the face of a concentrated and powerful enemy. He was launching an army, too, with all its artillery and baggage, into a tangle of trackless hills, gashed with deep defiles and swift mountain torrents, where it would seem that only goats could pass. But genius overrides rules. Graham, in some respects, seemed very unsuited for the leadership of an expedition which, in daring and hardship, almost rivals Suwarroff's march over the St. Gothard in 1799 or Napoleon's passage over the Alps in 1800. "He is a very fine old man," wrote Larpent in that year, "but does not look quite fit for this country work." Graham, it is true, was sixty-eight years old, and was a soldier by accident rather than by training. But he had all the stern energy of the Scottish character, and his soldiers were in a mood of fighting temper which hardship could not cool nor perils daunt.

The French, though in their ranks were veterans who had toiled through the snows of St. Bernard with Napoleon, counted the wild and hilly region on their right impassable for the passage of an army. It was shaggy with forests, horrent with snowy peaks, scored deep with leaping mountain torrents. Three great rivers had to be crossed; hill-crests, white with



winter snows or buffeted with angry winds, had to be surmounted, and many a mountain pass, that never before had echoed to the tramp of disciplined battalions, had to be threaded. But Graham's hardy columns pressed on with tireless energy. Where horses could not draw the guns, men hauled them by hand; where wheels could not pass, the artillery was lowered with ropes down cliff-sides, and dragged up to the wind-whipped summits.

Soon the whole crest of the mountains between the Ebro and the sea was in their possession. Graham began his march on May 16; on the 31st he had reached the Esla; and so completely were the French deceived, that not till the 18th, when Graham made his appearance far on their flank, did the French guess Wellington's strategy. The strong position on the Douro in an instant became worthless, and in the confusion of hurried retreat the French fell back towards Burgos. Madrid was abandoned. Burgos and Valladolid followed. Joseph, indeed, proposed to offer battle on the high plains round Burgos. He had an army of 55,000 men, with 100 guns; and here, if anywhere, he might strike a blow for the crown of Spain. Burgos was the key of the north of Spain, the last stronghold held by the French south of the Ebro. It was here that, in the last campaign, an English army had suffered disaster.

But the fierce and eager march of Wellington's left wing under Graham never ceased, and almost with-



out a shot being fired each strong position held by the French was turned. Graham by this time was across the Esla, and pressing tirelessly onwards towards the Ebro. The Esla was crossed on May 31, and the passage offered a wild scene. The ford was uncertain, the water nearly chin deep, the bottom a mere quarry of rough and sliding stones, and many lives were lost. But nothing could check the torrent of war flowing with far-heard tumult through the deep valleys towards the Ebro. If Graham succeeded in crossing that river in advance of Joseph, his communications with France would be broken. On the night of June 12 Joseph abandoned Burgos, first laying great mines to blow up the castle. These were fired with fuses calculated to bring about an explosion after a delay of hours, and, it was hoped, just as the eager British van reached the town. But the fuses proved too quick, and the mines, charged with a thousand shells, exploded while the last battalions of the French rear-guard were defiling through the town. The hills round Burgos shook to the deep blast, the wave of reverberating sound swept over fifty miles of space. Graham's troops, far off in the hills, paused in their march for a moment as they caught the faint yet deep and sullen roar of the explosion. The castle was wrecked, but 300 French infantry were also destroyed instantly by the explosion.

It is curious to remember that this tremendous

blast of sound awoke—it is not easy to understand why—a history-making purpose in Wellington's brain. He told Croker long afterwards, "When I heard and saw this explosion (for I was within a few miles, and the effect was tremendous), I made a sudden resolution"—(with emphasis)—"*instantanément*—to cross the Ebro and endeavour to push the French at once to the Pyrenees." The mind has its puzzles, and no one can tell why, stirred by the blast that wrecked Burgos, the vague half-shaped and half-unconscious plan of a great campaign lurking in the cells of Wellington's brain should have suddenly crystallised into clear resolve. Perhaps the sound of the great explosion, and the sight of Burgos tumbling into ruins, made Wellington suddenly conscious both of the power of his own movement and of the severity with which it was pressing on the French. "All about me," he says, "were against my crossing the Ebro." But Wellington, almost with a breath, reached the point of audacious resolve. Thus, when some nameless French engineer put his match to the fuse in the mine at Burgos, he was touching a line of intellectual forces which thrilled through Wellington's brain, and in their after effects helped to shake down the throne of Napoleon.

"Dubreton's thundering castle," which had mocked Wellington's power eight months before, thus disappeared like a dream. Hill and Wellington were pressing on the French front, and still Graham's

hardy untiring columns were pushing their resolute march past the French right. The tumult of retreat broke out afresh in Joseph's army. But pursuit was swifter-footed even than flight. Down the left bank of the Ebro now came Graham at speed. Still backward the French were thrust, till, in all the whirl of breathless retreat, their crowded divisions, burdened with the plunder of a kingdom, eddied into the shallow little oblong valley of Vittoria. Wellington had obtained all the results of a dozen battles almost without firing a shot, and by mere force of skilful and audacious strategy.

Leith Hay declares that Wellington's turning march past the French right, which preceded Vittoria, was "the most masterly movement made during the Peninsular war." As an incidental advantage it gave to Wellington all the northern and western sea-coast of Spain. Portugal became unnecessary as a base, and the British found safe and easy communication with their ships in every harbour on the coast of Biscay. But the chief merit of this fine strategy was that it gave Wellington the advantage of a dozen victories with scarcely the loss of a life. It swept the French back to the Spanish frontier. And Joseph, burdened with the plunder of a kingdom, his troops disorganised by a hurried and unexpected retreat, had to risk the chances of a great battle to escape being driven in wild wreck through the passes of the

Pyrenees. The battle of Vittoria is the natural and calculated climax to the strategy which thus, in six weeks, had driven Joseph's army across nearly 200 miles of strong positions into a narrow valley amongst the hills of Biscay.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE ROUT OF VITTORIA

VITTORIA is a shallow valley about eight miles broad and ten miles long, lying within steep fences of girdling hills. The town itself is at the eastern end of the valley. A wall of rugged hills—the Puebla range—bounds it on the south; a parallel range serves as a wall to the north. To the east, where Vittoria stands, these ranges meet in a sort of apex, while a range of hills called the Morillas serves as a western base to the triangle of hills, within which lies the scene of the great battle. The Zadora, a narrow stream with deep banks, bisects the triangle, running from Vittoria in the east straight down to the base of the western hills, then swinging round at right angles to the southern range, and finding an escape through a deep and wild defile which breaks the angle where the Morillas and the Puebla ranges meet; thence it flows into the Ebro. The valley has, roughly, the shape of a bottle, with the town of Vittoria as the cork. The royal Madrid road runs from the Puebla pass up the left bank of the Zadora to Vittoria; thence it forms the

main road to Bayonne and to the Pyrenees. This constituted Joseph's line of retreat.

Joseph's army, 70,000 strong, filled the valley with the glitter of arms. Their first position was on a low ridge that crossed from north to south in front of the village of Arinez, and commanded the valley of the Zadora with its seven bridges. So confident were the French in the overmastering fire of their guns, that they did not break down these bridges—a fatal blunder. A second and loftier range, on which stood the village of Gomecha, stretched from the Zadora to the Puebla range; and still higher in the rear rose the town of Vittoria itself.

Behind the French lines was the plunder of fifty provinces, vast convoys of waggons and carriages, the whole court equipage of Joseph, camp-followers, Spanish officials, the wives and mistresses of French officers, &c. A French prisoner after the battle said to Wellington, "*Le fait est, Monseigneur, que vous avez une armée, mais nous sommes un bordel ambulante!*" Loud, distracted, and far-heard was the tumult of men and horses and carriages hurrying with dust and clamour eastward, along the great causeway which runs towards the Pyrenees into France. The French, it must be remembered, had been plundering Spain with French method and thoroughness for more than five years, and they were now practically submerged beneath their own booty. Convoys laden with the accumulated plunder of a hundred cities

# BATTLE OF VITTORIA

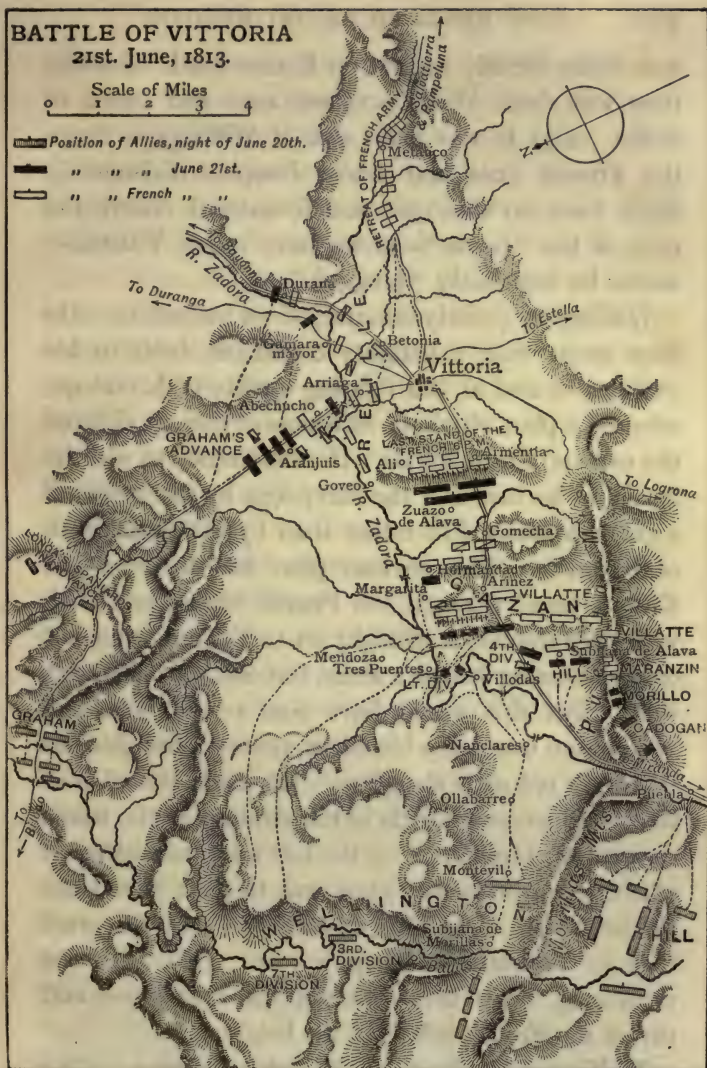
## 21st. June, 1813.

Scale of Miles  
0 1 2 3 4

Position of Allies, night of June 20th.

" " " June 21st.

" " French " "



Walker & Bontall sc.



were being eagerly pushed on France-ward. But the time was short, Wellington was near and eager to strike. And it was plain that if Wellington broke the French lines and drove Joseph's divisions in flight back on this vast and ill-ordered crowd, the neck of the "bottle"—as we have called Vittoria—would be hopelessly "plugged."

Wellington quickly determined on his tactics. He once more, with a haughty confidence both in his own genius and in the fighting quality of his troops, adopted a plan which, in its excess of daring, violated the canons of military art. He determined to win the battle, as he had won the campaign, by the stroke of a great captain's skill rather than by the actual push of bayonets. The obvious plan was to cross the Zadora, break through the French centre, and push with fiery resolution straight on to Vittoria, thus not only shattering Joseph's army, but cutting off his left wing. But this would have cost 10,000 men, and Wellington counted a bloodless victory more glorious than one red with slaughter. He made the plan of the battle a copy in little of the strategy of the whole campaign. Graham, with the left wing, consisting of 18,000 men and twenty guns, was to push round the northern wall of the hilly triangle and seize the great road to Bayonne in Joseph's rear. Hill, with the right wing, was to break through the Puebla pass and thrust the French left from the heights.

Wellington understood French character. The



sound of Graham's guns rolling sullenly over the hills, and past the French right, would put an almost irresistible pressure on the French imagination. That thrust at their communications would act like the prick of a lancet on the nerve of a limb. It would shake the whole French army almost into dissolution. Then when the French centre had been weakened to sustain the fighting on either flank, Wellington himself, with the British centre, would break through on their front, and drive Joseph's whole army back in ruin on Vittoria. And if Graham actually succeeded in seizing the great road to Bayonne, the French retreat would be flung aside on to the marshy roads to Salvatierra. It was audacious strategy. It meant that, in the presence of an enemy of equal strength and holding a central position, Wellington divided his forces and attacked at three remote and independent points, in country so wild and rugged that no communication could be maintained betwixt the British columns.

June 21, the day of battle, was a Sunday—the longest summer day of the year. It illustrates the uncertainty of history that the experts contradict each other flatly as to the manner on which that day of fate dawned. Napier, who was not present, says, "The morning was rainy and heavy with vapour." Leith Hay, who was present, riding in Wellington's staff, says, "The morning was extremely brilliant; a clearer or more beautiful atmos-

phere never favoured the progress of a gigantic conflict."

The aspect of the battlefield was curiously brilliant. The stern hills on either flank, narrowing as they approached Vittoria, defined the scene of the conflict perfectly; and as the two positions held by the French rose in steps one above the other, their whole battle, with its "magnificently stern array," was visible at a glance. L'Estrange describes how the sight of this great army of enemies impressed the imagination of a young soldier, looking on his first battlefield. Henry, in his "Events of Military Life," says that as he stood with his regiment in the British centre on the crest of the Morillas, they caught their first glimpse of the whole French army in the order of battle, with the roofs of Vittoria sharp-cut against the horizon beyond their masses. The French front was betwixt five and six miles in length, the troops in column, the artillery clustered upon every summit. He draws a graphic pen-picture of the rival hosts. "The dark and formidable masses of the French were prepared at all points to repel the meditated attack—the infantry in column with loaded arms, or ambushed thickly in the low woods at the base of their position, the cavalry in lines with drawn swords, and the artillery frowning from the eminences with lighted matches; while on our side all was yet quietness and repose. The chiefs were making their observations, and the men walking about in groups

amidst the piled arms, chatting and laughing and gazing, and apparently not caring a pin for the fierce hostile array in their front." But this represents only the scene at the centre. Graham's columns had moved at dawn, and, curiously enough, the French remained long in ignorance of that deadly stroke at their communications.

Hill, two hours after Graham had started, leaped with such suddenness and speed on the Puebla gorge—the shoulder of the great range rising sheer on his right, the Zadora with its rocky bed to his left—that he was through the pass before the French could offer serious resistance; and he at once sent Morillo, a Spanish leader of known daring, with his brigade, to push the French off the flanks of the Puebla range, and so roll back their left wing. The hillside was so steep that the men seemed to climb rather than to march. Spanish valour is of eccentric quality, but at this moment it was in its highest mood. Morillo's lines swarmed up the rocky ascent, pushing back the French with steady volleys till the actual crest was reached. Then the French charged with the bayonet. They had the advantage of the ground; they met the Spaniards with a fury through which ran a flame of scorn, and the Spanish line was flung in ruin down the hilly slope, Morillo himself being wounded, but refusing to be carried off the ground.

Hill, watching the struggle keenly, sent the 71st,



under Cadogan, and a battalion of light infantry, into the fight. Cadogan was a soldier of the finest type. The night before the battle he had been what his Highlanders would have called "fey"—in a mood, that is, of curiously exalted spirits—at the prospect of taking part with his regiment in one of the great battles of history. He led his men magnificently forward, the pipers shrilly blowing "Hey, Johnny Cope, are ye waukin' yet?" The slope was steep. The smoke blew thickly in their faces, and through the smoke flashed incessantly the darting flames of the French musketry. Fast fell the men; and yet the cool and disciplined lines never faltered. Up to the crest—their officers leading—and over it, the Highlanders went, and the French were driven headlong from their position. But the long wooded flank and the steep summit of the hill were strewn with the dead; and, as one survivor records, "there were 300 of us on the height able to do duty out of 1000 who drew rations that morning." Amongst the slain was Cadogan, and his best epitaph is found in a sentence which Wellington himself wrote to his brother the next day. "My grief for the loss of Cadogan," he wrote, "takes away all my satisfaction at our success."

While Hill's musketry fire was thus sparkling fiercely on the black slopes of Puebla, and far off in the east Graham's guns could be heard in deep waves of sound, Wellington commenced his attack on the

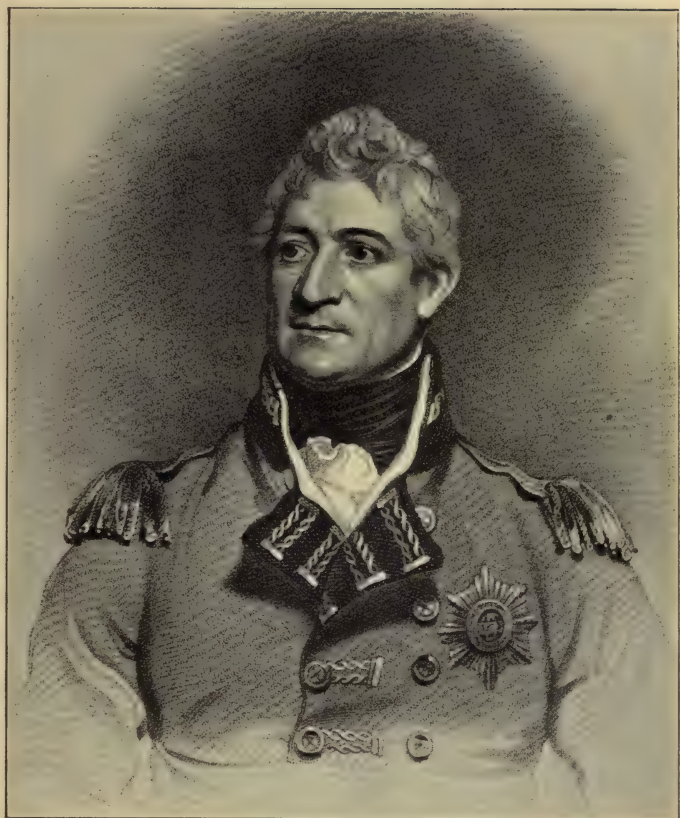


bridges which crossed the Zadora. The river at that point forms a sharp loop; the bridges were small and close to each other. A Spanish peasant brought the news that one of the bridges was unguarded, and Barnard's Rifles were at once sent forward to seize it. The men came on at the double, with rifles cocked. The bridge was crossed. Up a steep curving white road to the summit of a low hill crowned by an old chapel the Rifles pressed, and found themselves almost within musket-shot of the French centre. A French battery fired two round shots at the little group of Barnard's men, who stood for a moment visible on the crown of the hill, and one of these slew the peasant who had guided the British across the river.

Next came the whole of Kempt's brigade. They crossed the bridge and formed under the shelter of the hill. "Our post," says an officer who was present, "was most extraordinary, as we were isolated from the rest of the army, and within 100 yards of the enemy's advance. As I looked over the bank, I could see El Rey Joseph, surrounded by at least 5000 men, within 500 yards of us." But the French still made no move. The 15th Hussars followed over the bridge in single file, came up the steep path at a gallop, and dismounted in the rear of the Rifles. Some French dragoons now came up at a leisurely pace to see what was going on below the ridge, but a few shots from the Rifles drove them back.

The 3rd and 7th divisions were now moving forward to attack the bridge of Mendoza. The French batteries opened upon them, and a strong body of French cavalry was brought up in readiness to charge the head of the British column the moment it crossed the bridge. But Barnard, who was already (as we have seen) across the river, took his Rifles at a run betwixt the river-bank and the French guns and cavalry, and smote them both in flank with a fire so sharp that they fell back, and the Mendoza bridge was carried.

The story of Picton's part in this movement has in it an element of grim humour. Kincaid, who belonged to the Rifles, had already caught a glimpse of the famous leader of the "Fighting Third." "Old Picton," he says, "rode at the head of the 3rd division, dressed in a blue coat and a round hat, and swearing as roundly all the way as if he had been wearing two cocked ones." But, somehow, the order to move had not reached Picton. The battle thundered to right and left; some of the other bridges had been carried, but the 3rd was apparently forgotten. Picton's fighting blood was up; his anger at receiving no orders grew furious. "D— it!" he said to one of his officers, "Lord Wellington must have forgotten us!" He rode to and fro in front of his men, watching the fight, fuming to plunge into it, and beating the mane of his horse angrily with his stick. An aide-de-camp, riding at



SIR THOMAS PICTON





speed, came up, and inquired where Lord Dalhousie, who commanded the 7th division, was. Picton, in wrathful tones, declared he knew nothing of Lord Dalhousie; were there any orders for him? "None," said the aide-de-camp. "Then, pray, sir," said the indignant Picton, "what orders do you bring?" The aide-de-camp explained that Dalhousie was to carry the bridge to the left, and the 4th and 6th divisions were to support the attack. The "Fighting Third," in brief, were to look on as spectators while other divisions did the work! Rising in his stirrups, Picton in tones of passion shouted to the astonished aide-de-camp, "You may tell Lord Wellington from me, sir, that the 3rd division, under my command, shall in less than ten minutes attack the bridge and carry it, and the 4th and 6th divisions may support if they choose." Then turning to his men, who were chafing for the fight, he cried affectionately, "Come on, ye rascals! Come on, ye fighting villains!" And, let loose with those paternal epithets, Picton's "fighting villains" promptly carried the bridge.

The spectacle of Picton's charge kindled the whole battle-line in its neighbourhood. Costello describes how the Rifles were keenly skirmishing with the French when "we heard a loud cheering to our left, and beheld the 3rd division charge over a bridge much lower down the stream. Fired with the sight, we instantly dashed over the bridge before us."

Nothing could be more impressive than the

spectacle at that moment. "The passage of the river," says Maxwell, "the movement of glittering masses from right to left as far as the eye could range, the deafening roar of cannon, the sustained fusillade of the artillery, made up a magnificent scene. The British cavalry, drawn up to support the columns, seemed a glittering line of golden helmets and sparkling swords in the keen sunshine, which now shone on the scene of battle." L'Estrange, who was with the 31st, gives one touch of unexpected colour to the scene. The men, he says, were marching through standing corn, yellow for the sickle, and between four and five feet high, and the cannon balls, as they rent their way through the sea of golden grain, made long hissing furrows in it.

"In all my military life," says Costello, "this sight surpassed anything I ever saw; the two armies hammering at each other, yet with all the coolness of a field-day exercise, so beautifully were they brought into action."

The hill in front of the village of Arinez was the key of the French line, and Wellington took Picton with the 3rd division in close columns of regiments at a running pace, diagonally across the front of both armies, to attack it, while the heavy cavalry of the British came up at a gallop from the river to sustain the attack. The hill was known as "the Englishmen's hill." It was the scene of a great fight in the wars of the Black Prince, where Sir William Felton, with

200 archers and swordsmen, being surrounded and attacked by 6000 Spaniards, all perished, and the story of their dogged valour still lives in the legends of the neighbourhood. The fight on this spot was, for a few minutes, of singular fierceness. Fifty French guns covered the hill with their fire, the French infantry clung with furious valour to the village. "The smoke and dust and clamour," says Napier, "the flashing of firearms, the shouts and cries of the combatants, mixed with the thundering of the guns, were terrible." A battalion of Rifles found themselves in front of a long wall, strongly held by some battalions of French infantry, and the blaze of fire for a moment checked the Rifles. Running forward, however, they reached the wall, and for a few moments on either side of that unconscious barrier of brickwork was a mass of swaying, shouting, and furious men. "Any person," says Kincaid, who was one of the Rifles pressing against the wall, "who chose to put his head over from either side, was sure of getting a sword or a bayonet up his nostrils."

In a moment, however, the Rifles broke over the barrier, and the French fell back through the village, carrying their guns with them. The Rifles pushed on eagerly to seize the guns, and one officer, young and swift-footed—Lieutenant Fitzmaurice—outran his men, overtook the last French gun, caught the bridle of the leading horse, and tried to pull it to a stop. The French driver leaned over, and fired



his pistol at Fitzmaurice's head, but only shot off his cap! Fitzmaurice clung to the horse, and the Rifles coming up, the gun was captured.

L'Estrange describes, with all the vivacity of an eye-witness, the movement which marked the crisis of the fighting at the centre. "I heard a tremendous rush," he says, "on our left; the ground seemed actually to quake under me; and, looking in the direction of the sound, I saw the whole British host—artillery, cavalry, and infantry—throwing themselves on the line of the French army. Three or four regiments of cavalry were at the moment charging, and galloped up to the foot of the eminence on which the French line stood; it was too steep for the horses to ascend, and they were obliged to wheel. But the firm and uncompromising style in which the British army advanced was too much for the nerves of the French; they turned in retreat along their whole line, and the battle of Vittoria was won."

Graham, all this time, was waging fierce duel with Reille for the Bayonne road, on which depended the retreat of the French. Robinson, who commanded a brigade of the 5th division, formed his men in three columns and led them forward at the double to carry the bridge and village of Gamara; but the French fire was so furious that the strength of the attack was broken. Robinson rallied his men, took them on again, stormed the village, and even crossed the bridge. But the French in turn, gallantly led,



came back to the fight. Twelve guns concentrated their fire on the British as they tried to deploy when they had crossed the bridge. The French, in a word, held the bridge, the British the village, and neither could prevail over the other. More British troops came up. Again the bridge was carried and again lost; and Reille thus barred the passage of the river till the tumult of Wellington's battle in the centre, sweeping towards Vittoria, shook Reille's constancy. He fell back, and Graham held the Bayonne road.

In the centre the battle had resolved itself into a sort of running fight for six miles, the tumult and dust of the conflict filling the whole valley, and wakening confused echoes in the hills that looked down upon the scene. At six o'clock the French were holding the last ridge a mile in front of Vittoria. "The sun was setting," says Maxwell, "and his last rays fell upon a dreadful spectacle—red masses of infantry were advancing steadily across the plain—the horse-artillery came at a gallop to the front to open its fire upon the fugitives—the Hussar Brigade was charging by the Camino Real." The French clung with unshaken gallantry, but with broken and desperate fortunes, to this their last position. Here is Napier's picture of the scene:—

"Behind them was the plain in which the city stood, and beyond the city thousands of carriages and animals and non-combatants, men, women, and children, were crowding together in all the madness

of terror; and as the English shot went booming overhead, the vast crowd started and swerved with a convulsive movement, while a dull and horrid sound of distress arose; but there was no hope, no stay for army or multitude; it was the wreck of a nation! Still the courage of the French soldier was unquelled. Reille, on whom everything now depended, maintained the Upper Zadora, and the armies of the south and centre, drawing up on their last heights between the villages of Ali and Armentia, made their muskets flash like lightning, while more than eighty pieces of artillery, massed together, pealed with such a horrid uproar that the hills laboured and shook and streamed with fire and smoke, amidst which the dark figures of the French gunners were seen bounding with frantic energy."

Nothing, however, could check the strength of the British attack. The French were driven in confusion through Vittoria; Graham held the road to Bayonne, and Joseph turned his routed and broken troops upon the road to Salvatierra. The new line of retreat led through a marsh; the road was choked with carriages and fugitives; the British guns and cavalry were pressing on in stern pursuit. The French had to abandon their guns—they carried off but two pieces out of 150—and night fell upon such a scene as earthly battles have not often seen. The roads round Vittoria were strewn with the wreck of three armies, the prodigious booty of plundered Spain;

waggons, caissons, timbrels, abandoned guns, carriages filled with weeping women, droves of sheep and oxen, riderless horses. "It seemed," says an eye-witness, "as if all the domestic animals in the world had been brought to this spot, with all the utensils of husbandry, and all the finery of palaces, mixed up in one heterogeneous mass." "The plunder," says Alison, "exceeded anything witnessed in modern war; for it was not the produce of the sack of a city or the devastation of a province, but the accumulated plunder of a kingdom during five years." The military chest of the defeated army contained no less than 5,500,000 dols. This was strewn in glittering coin on the dusty crowded road; while of private wealth the amount was so prodigious that "for miles together the fighting troops may be said to have marched upon gold and silver, without stooping to pick it up."

Joseph himself only escaped capture by jumping out of one door of his carriage as his pursuers reached the other. He left his regalia and his sword of state, however, in the carriage; in it, too, were found a number of most beautiful pictures cut out of their frames and rolled up, the plunder of Spanish convents and palaces. Joseph had a nice taste in art, but was not in the least nice as to how he gratified it. As to guns, Wellington himself said, "I have taken more guns from these fellows than I took at Assaye." Marshal Jourdan's baton of command was



found amongst the booty, and sent by Wellington to the Prince Regent, who sent him in acknowledgment an English baton as marshal.

Leith Hay offers us one sudden and curious vision of a defeated army in flight. Late in the day Wellington rode to the summit of a low hill beyond Vittoria, whence, for a mile at least, the wreck of Joseph's army was visible. "The valley beneath," says Leith Hay, "represented one dense mass, not in column, but extended over the surface of a flat containing several hundred acres. The very scale of the multitude seemed to make motion impossible. Little movement was discernible," he says, "and inevitable destruction seemed to await a crowd of not less than 20,000 people." Ross's troop of horse-artillery was brought hurriedly up, and opened a shell fire on the huge mass, which, with a wave of panic, broke loose in one far-scattering wave of fugitives.

The French, curious to say, suffered comparatively little in the retreat. Lord Hill's biographer says that this was due to the speed with which the French fled. "They fled so fast," he says, "king, marshals, generals, and men, that the allies, who had been sixteen hours under arms, and had marched three leagues since the day dawned, had no chance of overtaking them." But this is scarcely just to the French. Their courage was not broken though their fortunes were wrecked, and always a valiant rear-guard was maintained. Tomkinson, in his "Diary of



a Cavalry Officer," has described how the British cavalry rode in again and again upon the French rear-guard. "I rode up," he says, "within a yard of the enemy's infantry: they had their arms on the port, and were as steady as possible, not a man of them attempting to fire till we began to retire. They certainly might have reached myself and many others with their bayonets had they been allowed. I never saw men more steady and exact to the word of command."

The truth is, that the efficiency of the British pursuit was greatly hindered by the vastness of the plunder which fell into the hands of the British soldiers. Intemperance broke out amongst the troops; the bonds of discipline were for the moment relaxed. In the actual battle only some 5000 men were killed and wounded, but three weeks after the battle above 12,000 soldiers had temporarily disappeared from their colours.

Napoleon's wrath at the disaster of Vittoria may be imagined. He writes from Dresden on July 3, 1813: "It is hard to imagine anything so inconceivable as what is now going on in Spain. The king could have collected 100,000 picked men; they might have beaten the whole of England." A week later he writes from Wittenberg: "I have ordered the Minister of War to suspend Marshal Jourdan, to send him to his country residence, and keep him there till he has explained what has happened." He

is bitterly angry that his Minister of War has expended a few compliments on the unhappy Joseph. "When a man's inept folly has ruined you," he wrote on July 11, 1813, "I may, indeed, show him sufficient consideration not to take the public into my confidence, but it is hardly an occasion on which to pay him compliments." He bids his Minister tell Joseph that "his behaviour has never ceased bringing misfortune on my army for the last five years. It is time to make an end of it. There was a world of folly and cowardice in the whole business." The army in Spain, he said later, had a general too little and a king too much.

But while Napoleon thus tore his hair in private on the subject of Vittoria, he sent round a circular to all his Ministers to guide their utterances as to Spanish affairs. The French armies, they were to say, "were making certain changes in their positions, and a somewhat brisk engagement with the English took place at Vittoria, in which both sides lost equally. The French armies, however, carried out the movements in which they were engaged, but the enemy seized about 100 guns which were left without teams at Vittoria, and it is these that the English are trying to pass off as artillery captured on the battlefield!" To resolve Vittoria into "a somewhat brisk engagement," and one in which "both sides lost equally," is, even for Napoleon, a quite heroic feat of lying! "As for the newspapers," Napoleon

writes to Clark on August 1, 1813, "nothing must be said either of the Vittoria business or of the king."

Wellington, it will be remembered, ranked Vittoria as one of his three greatest victories. It revealed to the world his real scale as a general. Napier sums up the results of the battle in his own resonant and stately sentences: "Joseph's reign was over; the crown had fallen from his head. And, after years of toils and combats, which had been rather admired than understood, the English general, emerging from the chaos of the Peninsula struggle, stood on the summit of the Pyrenees a recognised conqueror. From these lofty pinnacles the clangour of his trumpets pealed clear and loud, and the splendour of his genius appeared as a flaming beacon to warring nations."

It is a touch, perhaps, of bathos, but it has all the effect of humour, to read of the condition in which the unfortunate Joseph emerged from the battle. "King Joseph," writes Larpent in his "Journal" the morning after the battle, "had neither a knife and fork nor a clean shirt with him last night!"

With Vittoria, indeed, Joseph practically vanishes from history. Two years afterwards he landed at New York disguised under the plebeian title of Monsieur Bouchard, and he settled down into the peaceful repose of a New Jersey farm, where, if he

had less splendour than at Madrid, he had fewer agitations. He was offered the crown of Mexico, but, with a brilliant flash of common sense, he refused it, with the remark that he had worn two crowns and would not run the risk of trying a third.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### SAN SEBASTIAN AND THE PYRENEES

ON July 1, with the exception of the garrisons of Pampeluna and San Sebastian, and Suchet's sorely shaken forces on the east coast, not a French soldier remained in Spain. Three great armies had practically vanished like wreaths of wind-blown mist. Clausel, with 18,000 men, had narrowly escaped capture. He had fallen back upon Saragossa, making a forced march of sixty miles in forty hours, and thence found his way through a difficult hill-pass into France, leaving most of his artillery and baggage behind him. Graham had pushed Foy and his division out of Irun and across the Bidassoa, the stream which marks the boundary of Spain. But the French still held the two great fortresses of Pampeluna and San Sebastian. Wellington knew Pampeluna to be badly provisioned, and he established a strict blockade upon it, trusting to the slow logic of hunger to compel its surrender. But San Sebastian needed sterner and swifter treatment. It was a port in daily communication with France, and Wellington could not advance through the Pyrenees, leaving San

Sebastian like a thorn in his flank. It was a third-rate fortress, ill-armed, and believed to be imperfectly garrisoned.

Fortune, however, had given San Sebastian a commander with a genius for defence surpassing even that of Philippon at Badajos. Emmanuel Rey was in command of a great convoy moving towards France when the thunderclap of Vittoria shook French power in Spain into ruins. Rey sent on his convoy, threw himself into San Sebastian, and set himself, with soldierly promptitude, and infinite art and energy, to prepare for the great siege which he knew to be inevitable. And, thanks to his stubborn daring and exhaustless resource, the last syllables in the record of the Peninsular war shine, for the French, with a sort of baleful and splendid fame. Rey, it may be added, was something of a Falstaff—a French Falstaff—in personal appearance. Fraser, who was second in command of the British artillery in the siege, describes him as “a great fat man, heavy-bodied and moon-faced.” But that he possessed, in an almost unique degree, the qualities for holding a fiercely besieged post is amply proved by the bloody tale of San Sebastian.

Of all the famous sieges of the Peninsula, that of San Sebastian is the most tragical and dramatic; and in that fierce siege the fighting in the Pyrenees forms a sort of parenthesis, making up a little patch of battle landscape, strangely vivid and murderous,

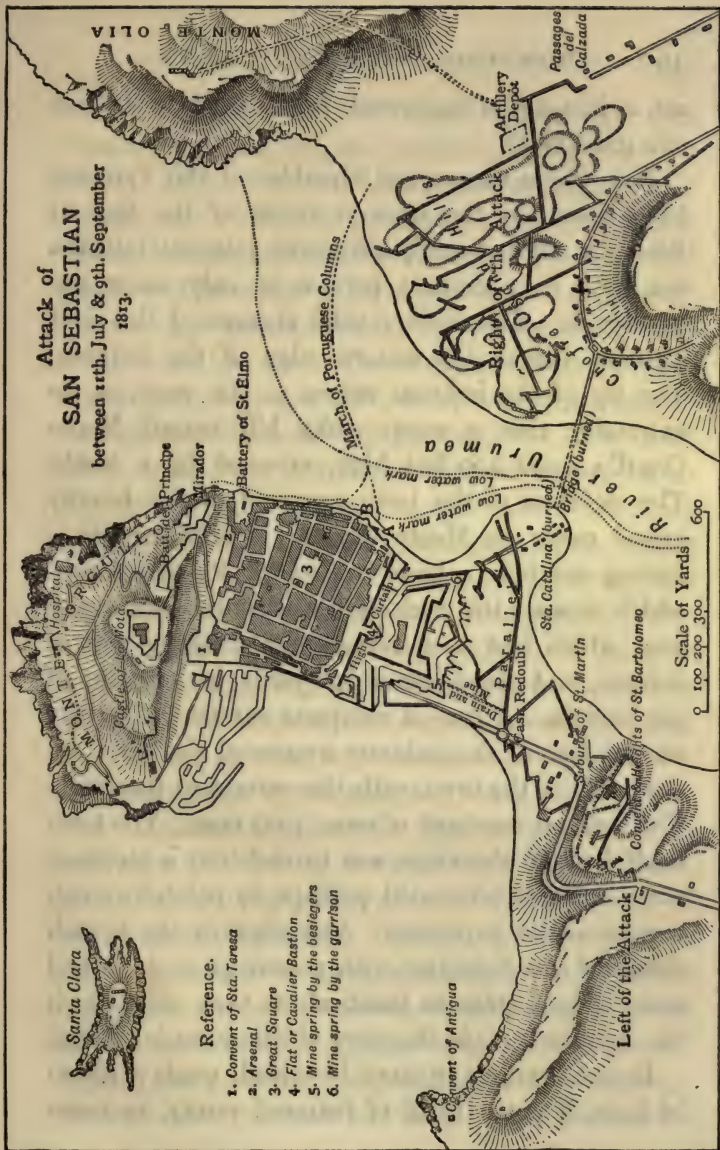
Santa Clara



# Reference.

1. Convent of Sta. Teresa
2. Arsenal
3. Great Square
4. Flat or Cavalier Bastion
5. Mine spring by the besiegers
6. Mine spring by the garrison

## Attack of SAN SEBASTIAN between 11th, July & 9th, September 1813.



Jones' "Journal of Sieges."

Walker & Boutwell sc.



set, as in a sort of framework, in the smoke and flame of a great siege.

Just where the rugged shoulder of the Pyrenees looks down on the stormy waters of the Bay of Biscay, a curving sandy peninsula juts out into the sea. At its narrowest part it is only some 350 yards wide. The shallow, tidal channel of the river Urumea defines the eastern edge of the isthmus. The tip of the isthmus curves to the west; on its extremity rises a steep rocky hill named Monte Orgullo, some 400 feet high, crowned by a castle. The defences of the town consisted of the heavily armed castle on Monte Orgullo; a solid curtain—jutting out into a huge horn-work at its centre—which crossed the neck of the isthmus; and a convent which had been turned into a strong post of defence, and stood some 600 yards in advance of the curtain. A line of ramparts running along the eastern face of the isthmus connected the castle, on the north of the town, with the curtain to the south. The garrison consisted of some 3000 men. The town itself, later in the siege, was turned into a tangle of street defences, suggested, perhaps, by painful French experiences in Saragossa. And certainly the French defended San Sebastian with a courage as high and stern, if not quite as fanatical, as that with which the Spaniards made the story of Saragossa immortal.

French courage, it may be added, needs a gleam of hope, if not a thrill of flattered vanity, to make



it perfect, and these useful ingredients were very happily supplied to the garrison throughout the siege. They were in daily communication with France, and so complete was their command of sea transit to the opposite French shore, that Trafalgar might well have been a French, instead of an English victory, and not England, but France have been mistress of the sea. The British Admiralty gave Wellington no help. His transports were captured almost daily by French privateers, and boats came every night from Bayonne to San Sebastian, bringing reinforcements, supplies, and aid of a more imaginative kind—carefully medicated news; frantic exhortations to courage; crosses, decorations, and promotions for the soldiers who distinguished themselves in the fighting each day. Above all, the open sea and the daily talk with Bayonne gave the French garrison in San Sebastian a constant sense, not only of imminent succour, but of certain and easy retreat.

Graham, with 10,000 men, had charge of the siege. His engineers adopted the plan of attack which had been followed by Berwick when besieging San Sebastian in 1719. They planted their batteries on the sandhills beyond the Urumea, and breached the eastern wall connecting the curtain with the castle. Simultaneously an attack was opened along the front of the curtain itself. A gallant, but furious and unwise, haste marked the earlier stages of the siege, Graham had youthful and fiery spirits about him,

fretting to reach French soil, and keen to employ against what seemed the feeble defences of San Sebastian the wild valour that had been shown on the great breach at Badajos.

The breaching batteries thundered tirelessly across the stream of the Urumea, each gun averaging 350 rounds in a little over fifteen hours; a torrent of flame in which the guns themselves seemed to melt almost faster than the wall beyond the river crumbled beneath the tempest of flying iron hurled upon it. The guns against the great convent in advance of the curtain got into action on their own account even earlier than the breaching batteries; and on July 17 the convent was stormed with fiery daring, and turned into an advanced battery against the curtain. On July 23, two breaches had been made in the eastern wall, and it was determined to attack.

The forlorn hope consisted of twenty men of the 9th and of the Royal Scots, under Colin Campbell, afterwards famous as Lord Clyde. Fraser was to lead a battalion of the Royal Scots against the great breach; the 38th was to leap on the smaller and more distant breach; the 9th was in support; the whole making an attacking force of 2000 men. Wellington had given orders that the assault should be delivered in fair daylight, but, by some blunder, the signal to advance was given while darkness still lay black on the isthmus, and so the batteries beyond the river could not aid the assault.

The men broke out of the trenches, and at a stumbling run and with disordered ranks, pressed over the slippery, weed-clad rocks towards the breach. The French, from the high eastern wall, under whose face the storming column was defiling, smote the British attack cruelly with their fire. Only some 300 yards had to be passed, but even in that brief space the slaughter was great. The leading files of the British halted, and commenced to fire at what seemed a gap in the wall, and which they mistook for the breach. That check at the head of the rush brought the whole column to a confused semi-halt, and along its entire extent, from the high parapets above them, poured a rain of musketry shot. Men fell fast. The confusion was great. Some of the officers broke out of the crowd, raced forward to the true breach, and pushed gallantly up its rough slope. On reaching its summit they saw before them a black gulf from twenty to thirty feet deep. Beyond it, in a curve of fire, ran a wall of blazing houses. On each flank the breach was deeply retrenched; and from the front, and from either side, there rained on the British stormers a tempest of missiles.

Nothing could surpass the daring of the British leaders. Fraser, who led the Royal Scots, leaped from the crest of the breach into the black gulf beyond, and died there. Officer after officer broke out of the crowd, and, with a shout, led a disconnected fragment of the storming party up the



breach, only to perish on the crest. The river was fast rising, it would soon reach the foot of the wall. The attacking force, with leaders slain, order broken, and scourged by a bewildering fire from every quarter, to which it could make scarcely any reply, fell sullenly back into the trenches. But thick along the base of the wall, and all up the slope of the great breach, splashing the broken grey of its surface with irregular patches of scarlet, lay the dead red-coated English.

That gallant but ill-fated rush, unhappy in all its incidents, cost the British a loss of nearly 600 men and officers. In the twenty days the siege had now lasted the total loss had reached 1300.

At this point there breaks in on the siege the bloody parenthesis of the fighting in the Pyrenees. Napoleon realised that what his armies in Spain needed most of all was a general. Fraternal affection, at any time, went for little with Napoleon; and with Wellington threatening to break in on French soil through the Pyrenees, the French emperor was not disposed to deal too tenderly with a brother who was guilty of the crime of failure. On July 1 an imperial decree was issued, superseding the unfortunate Joseph, and appointing Soult to the command of the army in Spain. That limping, club-footed soldier, now Massena had vanished from the stage, possessed the best military head at Napoleon's command, and he amply justified



Napoleon's confidence. Perhaps his zeal was pricked into new energy from the fact that his long quarrel with Joseph had ended in a personal triumph. Soult had, as a matter of fact, express authority to arrest the unhappy Joseph if he proved inconveniently obstinate.

On July 13 Soult reached Bayonne, and his quick brain, tireless industry, and genius for organisation, wove the shattered fragments of three defeated armies, with the speed of magic, into a great force of 80,000 strong, and he promptly formed the plan for an aggressive campaign, on a daring scale, in the Pyrenees. That campaign lasted only nine days; but it included ten stubborn and bloody engagements, was marked by some of the most desperate fighting in the whole course of the war, and involved a loss of 20,000 men.

On July 25 Soult put his columns in motion, first publishing an address to his soldiers of the true Napoleonic type, and announcing that a proclamation of victory would be issued from Vittoria itself on Napoleon's birthday, not three weeks distant. This was an audacious prophecy, which left out of reckoning Wellington and his army. As a matter of fact, when Napoleon's birthday arrived, Soult, with his strategy wrecked and his army defeated, was emerging breathless and disordered from the Pyrenees on French soil again.

It is impossible, in the scope of these pages, to give

an account, at once detailed and intelligible, of the fighting in the Pyrenees. The scene of operations was so tangled and wild, with peaks running up to the snows, and valleys sinking down into almost impassable gulfs, that only a model of the country in relief could make it intelligible to the reader. The barest outline of the operations is all that can be attempted here. The scene of the contest is, roughly, a parallelogram of mountains, its eastern face, some sixty miles long, stretching from Bayonne to St. Jean Pied de Porte, along which runs the river Nive; its western line stretches from San Sebastian to Pampeluna. These four places, at the angles of this hilly trapezoid, were held by the French; the siege against San Sebastian was being fiercely urged, and Pampeluna was sternly blockaded. Soult had to choose betwixt attempting the relief of one or other of these places. He believed Pampeluna to be in the greater danger, and resolved to march to its help.

If there be pictured some Titanic hand laid diagonally on this table of mountains, the wrist in front of Pampeluna, the knuckles of the hand forming the crest of the range, and the outstretched fingers—pointing towards Bayonne, but not reaching it—forming the hills and passes which look towards France—a rough conception of the scene of the fighting will be had. Soult had one great advantage over the English. On the level ground beyond these mountainous “finger-tips,” where the passes

sank to the plain, he could move his columns quickly, and pour them suddenly and in overwhelming strength into any pass he chose. Wellington's divisions, on the other hand, scattered along the summits of the hills running down towards France, were parted from each other by deep intervening valleys. It was quite possible, therefore, that Soult could throw his force with almost irresistible strength into a given pass, break through Wellington's line, raise the blockade of Pampeluna, and take Wellington's positions one after another in flank. Wellington had to cover the siege of two fortresses, parted from each other by sixty miles of mountains; and it would take him a day longer to concentrate on his right for the defence of Pampeluna than to call back his divisions round San Sebastian. This was another reason which led Soult to strike at the force holding Pampeluna blockaded.

With fine generalship he fixed Wellington's attention at the other extremity of his front by throwing bridges across the Bidassoa. Then, having tricked even Wellington's hawk-like vision, on July 25 he suddenly poured his strength into the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles. D'Erlon, with 20,000 troops, took the British by surprise in the pass of Maya. Napier, indeed, denies that the British were caught off their guard. "At least if the general was surprised," he says, "his troops were not." Stewart, who was in command, was a hardy soldier, but not a great



general; and Henry, in his "Recollections of Military Life," says, "To my certain knowledge, everybody in Maya was taken by surprise." Stewart had bidden his troops cook their dinner, and himself had gone back to Orizondo, when, at half-past eleven, the French columns were suddenly discovered coming swiftly up the steep ravine.

The British were flung into the fight in fragments, and as their regimental officers could bring them on. It was a battle of 4000 men, brought irregularly and in sections into action, against four times their number, and with the advantage in favour of the larger force both of surprise and of regular formation. Never was there fighting fiercer or more gallant. The men of the 82nd fought with stones when their ammunition failed. "The stern valour of the 92nd, principally composed of Irishmen," says Napier, "would have graced Thermopylæ." The 92nd would no doubt have fought just as magnificently if its ranks had been filled from Galway or from Kent, but, as the regimental roll shows, in its ranks were 825 Highlanders and only 61 Irishmen. Barnes' brigade, brought late in the day into the fight, checked the advance of the French with stern resolution, but by nightfall the British had lost 1500 men and ten miles of the pass.

Soult himself, with 35,000 men, led the attack on the pass of Roncesvalles. Byng stood in his path, posted on crags rising hundreds of feet in the air;



but he had only 5000 men, of whom more than half were Spanish. Byng was assailed by 18,000 French in front, while another column moved past his flank. Cole came up to Byng's support; and Ross, a fine soldier, with only three companies of the 20th and one of a German regiment, ran in upon the French column engaged in the flanking movement, and by sheer audacity arrested its advance. But the French were not to be denied. They pushed past the British flank, and at nightfall Cole, who was now in command, fell back, and the French gained the ridge. Pampeluna was only twenty-two miles distant. The next day, July 26, the British were still falling back, but a bewildering fog lay on the hills and filled the valleys with its blinding vapour. Soult was waiting to hear of D'Erlon's success in the pass of Maya; and his characteristic defect as a general—the lack of overpowering fighting energy—made him hesitate. He failed to strike hard at the retiring British; and as Picton was pressing up to join Cole, that hesitation robbed Soult of his best chance of success. On the morning of the 27th Picton and Cole were in front of Huarte, still covering Pampeluna. D'Erlon and Soult, in a word, had carried both passes, but they had failed to push resolutely on, down the reverse of the range, to Pampeluna, before the British could come up in force to bar the road.

On the night of the 25th Wellington heard of Soult's advance. He instantly converted the siege

of San Sebastian into a blockade, and rode to the scene of action, calling up his scattered forces as he rode. The 3rd and 4th divisions were in position at Sauroren when Wellington arrived. The two armies confronted each other from either side of the deep valley. Wellington had despatched his last aide-de-camp with an order to the troops in his rear, and rode alone on to the British position, halting on the shoulder of a hill where he was easily seen. A Portuguese battalion near saw him, and raised an exultant shout, which ran, a gust of stormy sound, along the curve of the British hill. As it happened, Soult, with his staff, was at that moment on the opposite slope, and so deep was the valley, and so near the opposite hill, that the two leaders could distinguish each other's features. Looking at his formidable opponent, Wellington said, as if speaking unconsciously, "Yonder is a great commander, but he is cautious, and will delay his attack to ascertain the cause of these cheers. That will give time for the 6th division to come up, and I shall beat him." That is exactly what happened. Soult hesitated. He failed to throw his whole strength into the fight till the next day. By that time the 6th division had come up, and Soult was defeated.

On the 28th Soult tried again to break through the British line, and the fight is known as the first battle of Sauroren. Wellington himself described the fight as "fair bludgeon-work;" Napier says "it

was a terrible battle." A French column, issuing from the village of Sauroren, moved straight up the hill, and in a fashion very unusual with the French—in perfect silence, that is, and without firing a shot. The speed and power of its charge remained unabated in spite of a tempest of lead poured on it. A Portuguese regiment in its path was shattered as with a thunderbolt, and the crest was won! Then Ross's brigade, with a loud shout, closed on the column in a fiery charge, and in turn flung it down the hill. But other columns of attack, as resolute and fierce as the first, were by this time flecking the whole hillside. It was an army of 25,000 attacking one of 12,000. At one point the assault was four times renewed, and, says Napier, "the French officers were seen to pull up their tired men by the belts, so fierce and resolute were they to win." But win they could not. "Every regiment," says Wellington, "charged with the bayonet, and the 40th, the 7th, the 20th, and the 23rd four different times." When night fell, nearly 2600 men had fallen on the British side, but they still kept the hill!

On the 29th the exhausted armies remained sullenly watching each other. Then Soult, with the adroitness of a good soldier, changed his tactics. He could not reach Pampeluna, but by moving at speed to his right, he could leap on Hill, and break through to reach San Sebastian. Reille was to hold the position in front of Wellington, and Soult, gather-



ing up D'Erlon with 18,000 men, marched at speed against Hill.

D'Erlon fell on Hill on July 30. He had 20,000 against Hill's 10,000. Hill fought stubbornly, and, finding that his left was being turned, fell back to a still stronger position in his rear, the loss being heavy on both sides. But meanwhile Wellington had penetrated Soult's plan, and instantly attacked Reille, who had been left in his front. Soult believed Reille's position impregnable; and so it might have proved to a general less adroit and troops less daring. Picton was thrust past the French left, the 2nd division turned their right; Inglis, with 500 men of the 7th division, carrying, by a desperate charge, the hill which formed the extremity of the French position. Byng, with his brigade, carried the village and bridge of Sauroren, and the French, attacked both in flank and front, were broken and driven back in great confusion. The British lost 1500 men in this fight, the French more than 2000, with 3000 prisoners.

Soult had thus failed in his leap on Pampeluna and on San Sebastian in turn; nothing was left now for him but to escape back to France. He marched all through the night of the 30th across the Donna Maria pass, and it became a neck and neck race with his pursuers, who were keen to cut him off. Twice he escaped by the narrowest interval of time. The Light Division, under Victor Alten, marched forty miles in nineteen hours to reach a



narrow bridge spanning a defile at Yanzi, which the French must cross. The British reached the edge of a cliff which overlooked the bridge just as the French, pushing on at utmost speed, and carrying their wounded, were crossing it. "We overlooked the enemy at a stone's throw, and at the summit of a tremendous precipice," says an officer who was an eye-witness of the scene. The British opened an almost vertical fire on the bridge, and the scene which followed was wild and tragical. The main body of the French escaped, but their baggage and many prisoners fell into the hands of the British.

On August 2 the British held almost exactly the same position as when Soult commenced his movements. Napoleon's best lieutenant, in a word, had failed, and French troops, fighting with a courage worthy of Arcola or of Eylau, had yet been driven, a wrecked army, with more than one-fourth their number slain or captured, in wild retreat out of the passes they had entered only ten days before with so much military pride. Then Wellington resumed his siege of San Sebastian.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE STORMING OF SAN SEBASTIAN

**I**N the pause which followed the fighting in the passes, Wellington strengthened his breaching batteries by guns from England, and after thirty days' blockade, on August 26 fire was opened afresh on San Sebastian. The attack was much more formidable than in the first stage of the siege. The plan was to enlarge the existing breach on the eastern front, establish another to its left, and batter into ruins the demi-bastion at the angle, where the curtain across the isthmus and the river-wall met. Sixty guns were now thundering on San Sebastian, and Rey, on the French side, made but a feeble reply to that unceasing hail of flying balls. He could not fight the English batteries, but he was devoting himself, with rare skill, to the task of making the assault, when it came to be delivered, hopeless, or of ensuring that success should be paid for by a terrific price of blood.

A great siege is a battle of wits as well as of guns, and there is a strain of humour as well as of heroism in the devices used on either side. Thus,

the British engineers knew that Rey had sown the breaches with mines, and was ready, when the columns were launched, to pour on them a torrent of fire from a dozen unsuspected points. They wanted to make him show his hand, and so on the night of August 29 a false attack was made. An officer of the 9th, with the men immediately about him, was ordered to leap from the trench and run up the face of the breach, making all the noise they could in the process. All the formalities of an assault were observed. At ten o'clock three distinct musket-shots were fired as a signal from the trenches. The breaching batteries, which had been silent, opened with fury on the breaches. Suddenly the bugles sang shrilly from the trenches. It was the advance! The batteries shifted their fire from the breach to the walls beyond. The French, by this time, had fully manned their defences, and in the darkness a handful of men, making the utmost noise possible, was launched against the breach.

Seventeen men of the Royals, their officer leading, sprang into the open, and running forward, distributed themselves across the whole front of the breach, and proceeded to mount it firing, and shouting at the top of their voices. Success meant death, for it meant the explosion of unknown mines under their feet; and failure meant death almost as surely, for they were seventeen men mounting a breach defended by thousands. The gallant seventeen, how-



ever, never flinched, but deliberately clambered up the rough slope of stone. The French, on their part, however, kept their heads, and shot down the little band of heroes in a few minutes, only their leader returning unhurt.

On the night of the 29th a single officer, Major Snodgrass, of the 52nd, discovered a ford in the river opposite the smaller breach. He coolly waded across, climbed to the breach's very crest, and looked down into the blackness beyond, the French sentinels being within five yards of him!

On the 30th the breaches were declared to be practicable. Two wide rugged gaps in the wall within a stone's throw of each other were visible, and the assault was fixed for next day, August 31. Robinson's brigade of the 5th division was to lead. Wellington, chagrined at the failure of the first assault, had issued an order calling for fifty volunteers from each of the fifteen regiments of the 1st, 4th, and Light Divisions; "men," the order ran, "who could show other troops how to mount a breach!" In response to that appeal, the whole three divisions named volunteered almost *en masse*, and there was the utmost difficulty in settling who should enjoy the luxury of sharing the passion of the assault, and teaching the men of the 5th division how to carry a breach.

Costello gives us a glimpse of the effect which that call for volunteers had on the men of the other



divisions. Two volunteers were invited from each company. Six immediately stepped forward from Costello's company, and a keen controversy arose as to who should be the favoured two. The dispute was settled by lot, and the envied distinction fell to two privates named Royston and Ryan. The sum of £20 was offered to either of these men by other disappointed privates if they would give up their envied privilege of being one of the stormers, and the offer was refused. But the chance thus eagerly sought was only that of the imminent risk of wounds and death.

The men of the 5th, on the other hand, were furious with the call for volunteers. Leith, who commanded the division, insisted on his own men leading; the volunteers were to be merely in support. There was some risk, indeed, of the men of the 5th firing on the volunteers from the other divisions instead of the French, if they had been given the lead!

The morning of the 31st came, with rain-filled skies and thick mists drifting down from the black flanks of the Pyrenees. A fog like a pall of smoky crape lay on San Sebastian, and for some time the besieging batteries could not fire. Presently the gunners could see their mark, and the sullen thunder of the guns rolled without pause through the damp air. At eleven o'clock silence fell, as by magic, on every smoking battery, and the stormers leaped from the trenches. Three mines

which had been driven against the eastern end of the curtain were exploded ; the silent and sorely-battered defences of San Sebastian broke into an angry fire along the two threatened faces, while from Monte Orgullo, rising high above the town, the batteries shot fast and furiously. Some French guns commanded the head of the trench from which the British troops were pouring, and the slaughter here was so great that the bodies of the slain had to be continually drawn aside to enable the stormers to pass. It was known that the French had driven a mine under a projecting mass of sea-wall for the purpose of blowing it down on the column of British stormers, and a dozen privates, headed by a sergeant, raced forward, and leaped upon the covered way, intending to cut the fuse which was to fire the mine. The French, flurried by that gallant dash, exploded the mine prematurely, slaying the whole heroic group. A great mass of masonry was thrown on the head of the storming party, killing many, but doing much less mischief than if the mine had been exploded later.

Maguire, of the 4th, who led the forlorn hope, was conspicuous for his stately height and noble figure, and as he lay dead on the breach after the fight was over, his face, as a brother officer wrote, "had the classic beauty of sculptured marble." He had a sure forecast of his own death. A fellow-officer found him dressing for the assault with un-

usual care, as if for some great function. "When we are going to meet our old friends whom we have not seen for many years," he explained, "it is natural to wish to look as well as possible!"

The men of the 5th division, unshaken by exploding mines and falling walls and the roar of hostile batteries, had meanwhile reached the breach and swept up to its crest, only to find themselves practically in a death-trap. They stood on the edge of a perpendicular descent from sixteen to thirty feet deep. The houses in front of the breach had been cleared away and an inner wall erected at a distance of about forty yards, from which the red flames of musketry volleys flashed incessantly. To leap down was death. On either flank the breach had been severed from the wall beyond by deep traverses, covered by the fire of long lines of grenadiers. The breach was not only scourged by musket-fire at close range; in front and on both flanks the guns from the castle, from the batteries on the hill slope, and from the high central horn-work in the curtain, covered the crest of the breach with their fire. The British engineers, in a word, had fatally miscalculated the difficulties of the assault. "Nothing," says Sir Thomas Graham, "could be more fallacious than the external appearance of the breach. Notwithstanding its great extent, there was but one point where it was possible to enter, and there by single file."



For two hours the great breach showed a spectacle not often witnessed even in the bloody annals of war. Again and yet again the stormers struggled up the breach, only to fall and die there. The succession of heroic and hopeless assaults never failed. "No man," says Sir Thomas Graham, "outlived the attempt to gain the ridge;" and still that fatal ridge, beyond which was only death, was edged with an ever-renewed front of daring soldiers. The volunteers in the trenches by this time had been let loose. They were calling out to know why they had been brought there if they were not to lead the assault. When at last the word was given, to use Napier's phrase, "they went like a whirlwind up the breaches." But it was only to perish on the splintered and blood-splashed edge. Of the 750 volunteers, every second man fell.

The fighting at the half-bastion of St. John was equally gallant and equally hopeless. The British stormers could not prevail, but they would not yield; they fought and died with obstinate courage. A column of Portuguese, led by Snodgrass of the 52nd, forded the river, and flung itself gallantly on the farther and smaller breach, with equal daring and equal unsuccess. Graham, in a word, misled by his engineers, or over-urged by the too-daring spirits about him, had committed his troops to an attempt where valour was useless and success seemed impossible.



Sir Richard Henegan stood by Graham's side watching the progress of the assault, the broad red column of the stormers flowing incessantly up the rugged breach and perishing at its summit. "Occasionally," he says, "the waving of an officer's sword and the gallant upward surge of the soldiers in response to it, kindled a gleam of hope," but the mass of the unsuccessful dead grew ever greater, and the line of the valiant living, who could not succeed yet would not retire, grew thinner. "It would be impossible," says Henegan, "to describe the working of Graham's stern face as he watched the slaughter of his troops."

At this crisis Graham's stubborn Scottish temper plucked victory out of what seemed the certainty of failure. A weaker commander would have withdrawn his troops, and perhaps blown out his own brains afterwards. But Graham, to quote Napier, "was a man to have put himself at the head of the last company, and die sword in hand upon the breach rather than suffer a second defeat." He was watching the assault from battery No. 15, on the farther side of the river, and, after a hurried consultation with Dickson, who commanded the artillery, he suddenly adopted a strange and perilous device. He turned fifty heavy guns on the high parapet of the curtain, which overlooked both of the breaches, and the fire from which was destroying the storming columns.

As an interesting detail, Henegan records that it was Dickson of the artillery who made the suggestion that won San Sebastian. He knew the quality of his gunners, and begged Graham to let the batteries open fire on the crest of the walls, whence the triumphant French were shooting down the British stormers.

It was anxious shooting, for the British troops were on the face of the breach, only a few feet below the line of fire from the British batteries. But Dickson's gunners knew the range perfectly, and for half-an-hour the parapet of the curtain was swept from end to end with a torrent of shot. Every French gun but two was dismounted. The parapet was strewn with torn and headless bodies. When the batteries were roaring their fiercest, a great store of shells, grenades, and cartridges, which the French had piled along the rampart, took fire, and ran with a blast of spluttering sound and flame along the crest of the parapet, destroying 300 French grenadiers as with a breath.

Then the British broke through. The traverse nearest the great breach was constructed of barrels filled with earth, brass guns, &c., leaving merely a gap close to the exterior wall, by which a single man could squeeze through. "Through this narrow entrance," says Leith Hay, "was San Sebastian taken." Through this gap, that is, the British soldiers first burst their way. They broke through, too, by the

demi-bastion, and reached the town by the steps running down from it into the street.

Just as the town was won, the low black skies hanging over the city awoke in tempest, and the tumult of earthly battle below was drowned beneath the rolling thunder in the cloudy sky-depths above. It was deep calling to deep; the anger of the sky rebuking the petty anger of the earth. But, heedless of tempest and thunder, men fought like devils in the streets of San Sebastian, and many, at least, of the British, broken loose from all restraint, seemed like very fiends. The town took fire, and ten days afterwards was still burning. Strange scenes of riot and cruelty were witnessed. Rey himself, with quenchless valour, fell back into the castle, and still held out, only surrendering, indeed, on September 8. When the garrison marched out with the honours of war, at its head, with drawn sword, walked Rey himself, accompanied by the scanty survivors of his staff, and every officer on Graham's staff saluted the grim old veteran with respect. He had lost San Sebastian, but had not lost his soldierly reputation. Rey was curiously unheroic in personal appearance, but to his gross and aldermanic body he added the brain and daring of a fine soldier.

Wellington paid a great price for San Sebastian. Some 70,000 shot and shell were poured on its defences, and in the trenches around this petty town, or on its breaches, not less than 3800 of Wellington's



troops fell; nearly as large an expenditure of life, as sufficed to win the history-making battle of Vittoria. The siege of San Sebastian is a conundrum not easily solved. Never was courage more desperate than that shown in the attack, yet never was courage so long cheated of its just reward. How was it that a third-rate fortress, and in bad condition when first invested, resisted a besieging army with a strong battering train for sixty-three days?

Napier gives a catalogue of "explanations," least important amongst which is the blunders committed by the besiegers. "Wellington," he says, "was between sea and shore, and received help from neither." The Spaniards, that is, refused to supply carts and boats; the British Admiralty failed to close Sebastian from the sea, or to give reasonable help in the landing of stores, &c. For the first time in war an important siege was maintained by women; for the stores for the besiegers were landed in boats rowed by Spanish girls. Soult's ten desperate battles in the Pyrenees, Napier thinks, were less injurious to the operations of the besiegers than the negligence and stupidities of the British Government. The over-haste of the besiegers, in brief, the scornful impatience of their valour, added to the sloth of the Spaniards, the serene indifference of the British Admiralty, and the persevering blunders of the British Government, explain why San Sebastian had



to be purchased at the cost of so much heroic and wasted blood.

In his Journal of the siege Jones shows how this dreadful slaughter was due, also, to mere neglect of the alphabet of engineering art, and the attempt to make the blood and valour of the soldiers a substitute for patience and scientific skill in attack. The capture of San Sebastian, with an adequate siege train and a sufficient use of breaching batteries, he says, would have been an easy and certain operation in eighteen or twenty days, and would have involved little loss of life. A too eager haste spread out that operation over sixty days, and cost the besiegers 3500 men and officers, killed, wounded, or taken prisoners.

Leith Hay gives a vivid picture of the scene offered by the great breach the day after San Sebastian was stormed. "The whole ascent of the breach," he says, "was covered with dead bodies; stripped and naked they lay on the ground where they had individually fallen, but in such numbers that on a similar space was never witnessed a more dreadful scene of slaughter. Behind this impressive foreground rose columns of smoke and ashes, and occasionally through the vapour was to be distinguished the towering castle keep, from whence, and from its batteries, issued, at intervals, an artillery discharge, or irregular and half-subdued musketry fire. Above all this was distinguishable the thunder of the British mortar batteries, as from the right

attack they poured shells upon the devoted rock, whose surface became furrowed and torn by their repeated explosions. Having walked up the face of the breach, I proceeded along the curtain, which presented a scene of indescribable havoc and destruction. The heat from the blazing houses was excessive; and from the midst of the mass of fire at intervals was to be heard the noise created by soldiers still busied in adding to the miseries that had overtaken the devoted town. Never was there in the annals of war a more decided case of annihilation than that of San Sebastian. The buildings all having communication, and being very closely arranged, ensured the conflagration becoming general—roofs falling, and the crashing of ruined walls that rolled down, and, in some cases, blocked up the passages in the street. The scene was rendered more impressive from the obscurity occasioned even at midday by the dense cloud of smoke that shrouded this scene of ruin and desolation.”

END OF VOL. III.

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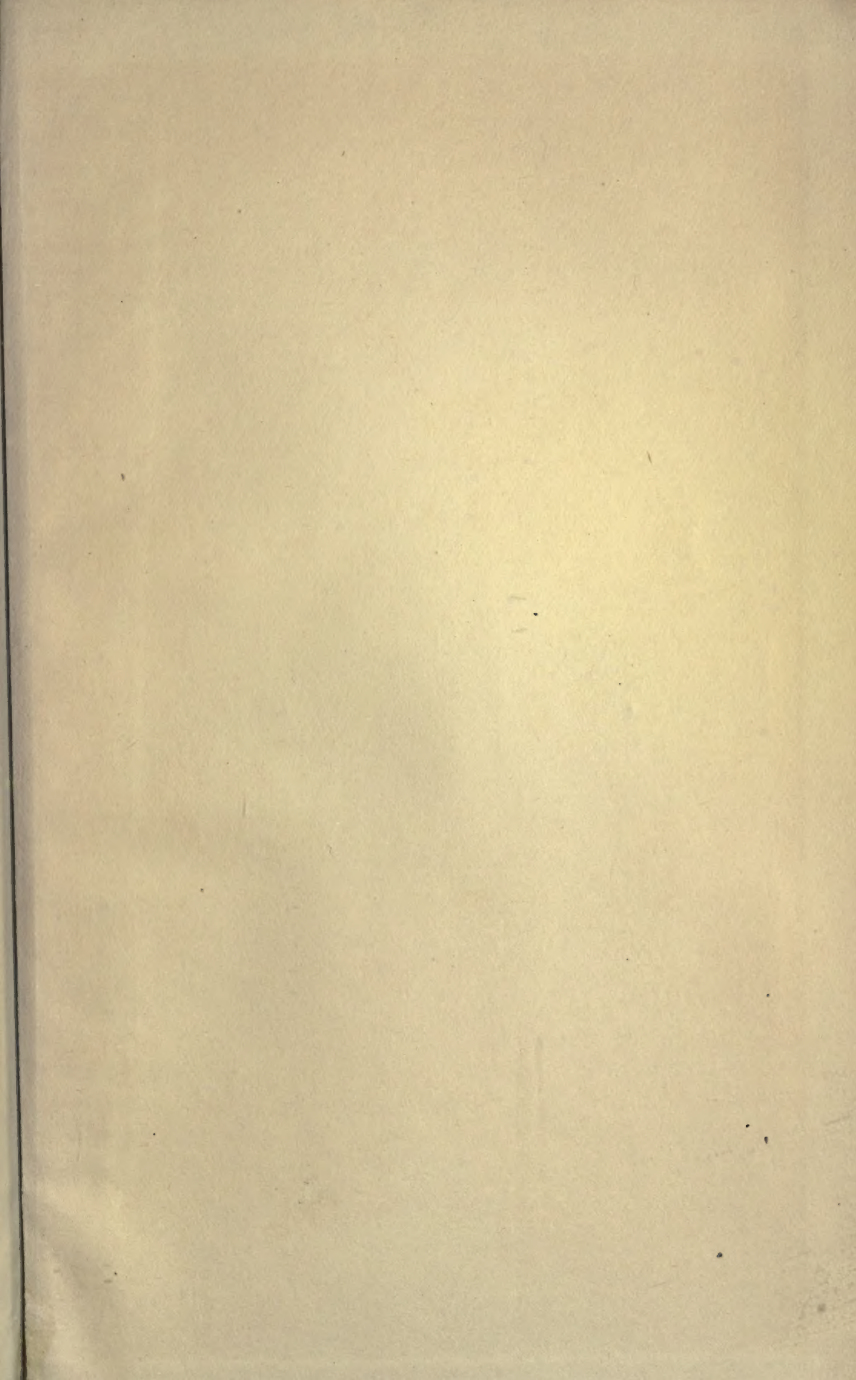
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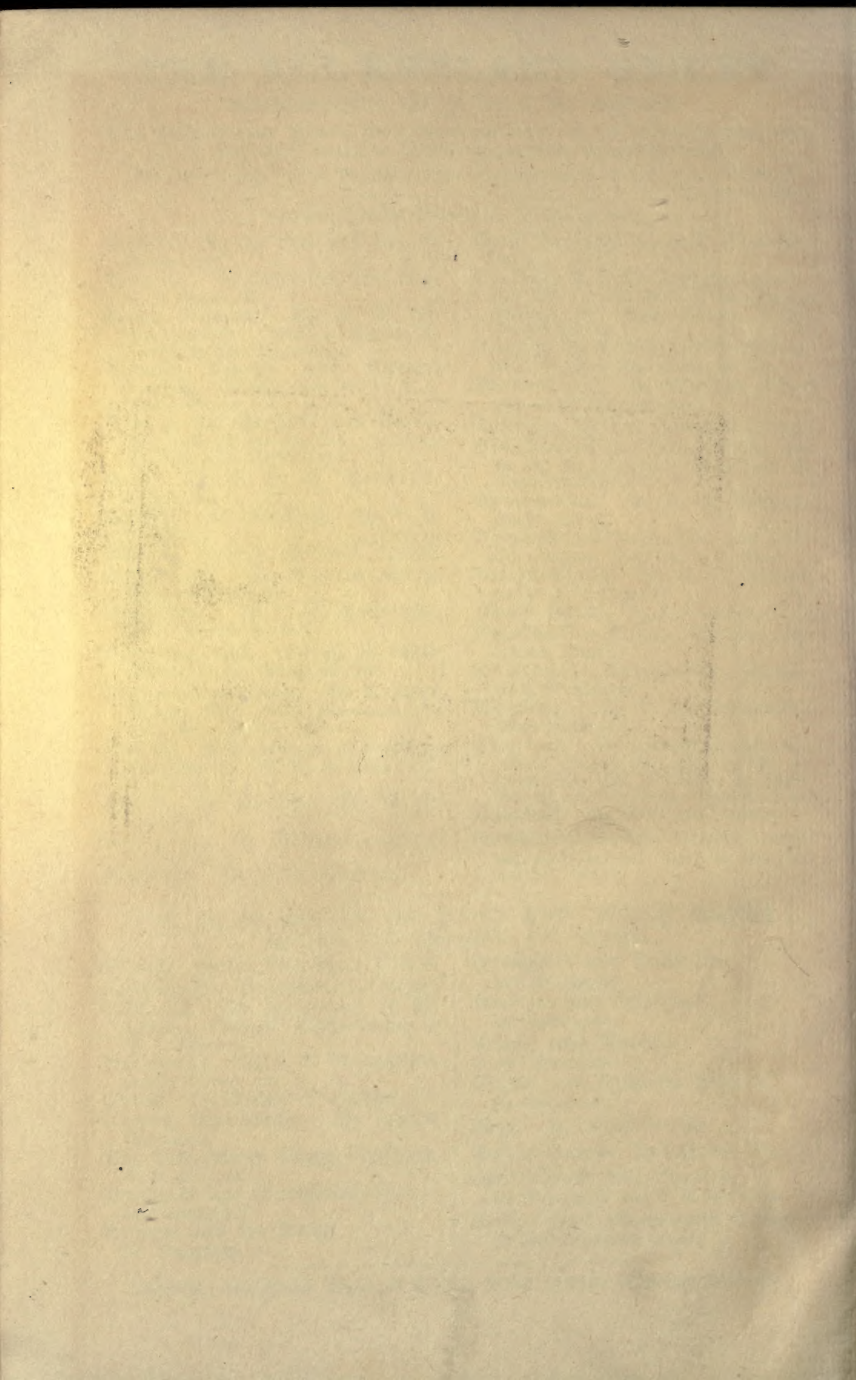
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